





THE NEW  
TESTAMENT  
ITS HISTORY  
AND MESSAGE

W. C. VAN UNNIK



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The New Testament

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ITS HISTORY AND MESSAGE

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# THE NEW TESTAMENT

ITS HISTORY AND  
MESSAGE

*by W. C. van Unnik*

*translated by  
H. H. Hoskins*

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## *Preface*

I am very glad to be allowed to write a foreword to this translation of a book by a friend so firm as Professor van Unnik has been to me since we first met on board a small ship in Greek waters in 1951.

It is a very simply written book. It might even deceive the reader into thinking that there were few major critical problems in the study of the New Testament. But the book was first intended for readers just beginning the study of the Bible; and the writer was quite deliberate in avoiding practically all of these problems and concentrating instead on summarising the contents of each book of the New Testament against its background in the ancient world.

Some simple books are simple because their writers have no very deep learning. This one is simple because the author, who is a very distinguished scholar of great erudition, has disciplined himself, and humbly concealed his learning. The result is that even the simplest remarks are actually supported by wide reading and long research. Take, as an example, the statement that Paul was brought to Jerusalem in early childhood and grew up and received his education there (see page 129). Not everyone who reads that innocent-looking remark will know that it represents an unusual view of Paul's education, worked out by Professor van Unnik and defended with great ingenuity and with a wide range of quotations from ancient literature in a quite substantial book.<sup>1</sup>

So let not the reader imagine that he is here being let into

<sup>1</sup> *Tarsus or Jerusalem? The City of Paul's Youth*, Epworth Press 1962.

## PREFACE

the secrets of the difficult art and craft of scholarship; but let him know that none of this simple and straightforward account is given him without long years of pondering and concentrated study. That it is given him by one who is passionately concerned for the message of the Scriptures and who loves the Lord it is unnecessary to say, for that lies on the surface. If his enthusiasm kindles readers to a life-long study of the New Testament itself, that, I know, will be his heart's desire.

C. F. D. MOULE

*Clare College*  
*Cambridge*  
*January, 1964*

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## *Canon or list of the books of the New Testament*

Gospel according to

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Acts of the Apostles (second part of Luke)

Letters of Paul : to the

Romans

Corinthians I and II

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

Thessalonians

Timothy I and II

Titus

Philemon

Letter to the Hebrews

Catholic or General Letters of

James

Peter I and II

John I, II and III

Jude

Revelation or Apocalypse of John

# *I. The New Testament as a Book*

## *1. The New Testament*

The second part of the Bible is known in the Christian church as the New Testament. It has the same title in many other European languages too (French: *Nouveau Testament*; German: *Neues Testament*; Dutch: *Nieuwe Testament*).

It consists of twenty-seven books attributable to at least nine different authors (see the list opposite) and is therefore not one continuous book in serial form, but more like an anthology. The various writings brought together in the New Testament were composed during the first century of our era (between A.D. 45 and 95); they all derive from countries situated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean; and they were all written in Greek, the international language of the time.

The books of the New Testament describe the person and the life and work of Jesus Christ in Palestine; and they show us how Jesus's work was carried into the world through the preaching of his earliest disciples, and what follows for mankind from the fact that this Jesus is 'Lord'.

Jesus's arrival on the scene of history is proclaimed in the New Testament as the decisive intervention of God. It is God's will that through this event men should be rescued and his kingdom re-established among them—for the right relationship between God and men had been completely disrupted.

The new and proper relationship which is established between God and men by divine intervention is reflected in the title, the *New Testament*. The expression may seem to us a strange one in this context. It reminds us perhaps of a 'last will and testament' of a deceased person. But here the word 'testament' is used in a different sense. It could be argued of course that even here it includes the idea of God's 'final will', but the God whose will is thus made known, so far from being a deceased person, is the Living God himself; and of Jesus Christ the New Testament declares that certainly he died once, but afterwards came back to life and is alive now.

A 'New' Testament is clearly meant to imply some sort of contrast with an 'Old' one. What then is the Old Testament? It comprises the books which the Christian church shares with Jewry as Holy Writ or Holy Scripture—that is, the Word given by God. The Jews, however, never refer to this as the Old Testament; they speak of the Law and the Prophets, or simply of the Scripture. This last expression is of Christian origin and is in fact short for 'the books of the Old or New Testament'.

In this special sense the word testament has a history behind it which is best presented in this way:

1. In English and in other modern languages: *testament*.
2. This is a translation of the Latin: *testamentum*.
3. The Latin rendered a Greek word: *diathèkè*.
4. This Greek word, which in ordinary Greek does indeed mean testament, was employed in the Greek version of the Old Testament (see p. 50) as the equivalent of a Hebrew word for *covenant*.

The Old Testament tells us that God made—established—a covenant with various persons: for example, with Noah (Gen. 9 : 9 ff.), Abraham (Gen. 17) and more especially with the people of Israel as a whole at Sinai (Exod. 19 ff.).

What it meant was that God had chosen this people to be his own, that they were to be devoted entirely to his service and that he had promised to give them his blessing. God laid down in his Law the various regulations which this covenant involved; but the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament shows that the people were disobedient and did not keep God's Law. Even so, he did not allow his work to be brought to nothing; and so the promise of a new Covenant was given—a promise most clearly set forth in Jeremiah 31: 31-34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The New Testament declares that through the coming and the 'work' of Jesus Christ God has proceeded to fulfil that promise. This is stated most explicitly in two places: first by the apostle Paul in II Cor. 3 and again in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 8. Those who believe in Jesus Christ—that is, who put their trust wholly in him—obtain fellowship with God; and the thing which stands in the way of this—namely, sin—is remitted or forgiven. Thus Jesus Christ brings into existence a new people; one that

is altogether obedient to God's will, is given over to his service, finding in that service the goal and purpose of its life.

That then is why the books which deal with the activities of Jesus Christ and show what it is that he signifies came to be known as *the books of the new Covenant*. We cannot say with any confidence exactly when that title was first given to the collection; but one finds it being used in that sense round about A.D. 190.

For the oldest Christian communities Holy Writ or Scripture meant the Old Testament, which spoke to them in shadows and prophecies of Christ and his work. Besides this there were various sayings of Jesus which circulated orally and were eventually brought together in the *Gospels* (see p. 53 ff.). There again, certain items of instruction which the disciples of Jesus—i.e. the *apostles* (see p. 73)—had put in their letters were carefully preserved as a guide to the local churches. So there evolved soon after the beginning of the second century a *corpus* or body of writings possessing authority for the Christian communities because they were a reliable means through which the teachings of Jesus and the teachings about him—not to mention the apostles' own pronouncements—could be handed on.

In the course of the 2nd century there arose a number of different schools of thought and influence, which not only taught a wide variety of doctrines but in order to spread them the more effectively associated them with the name of Jesus or sometimes with those of his apostles. This, of course, gave rise to confusion; and it was with the purpose of putting an end to it that lists of the authentic books were drawn up in various localities. These were known as the 'canon' (from a Greek word signifying 'a measuring-rod' and hence 'a rule'). The canon invariably included

the Gospels, the Acts and the Letters (or Epistles) of Paul, as well as a number of the so-called General Epistles (see chapter IV, section 3). Over certain writings there was, it is true, some difference of opinion—regarding Hebrews and the Revelation of John, for example; but by the middle of the 4th century a generally accepted consensus had been reached. The New Testament was by then of the same size as it is today.

Not all the material that exists concerning Jesus and his apostles is enshrined in this canon. Luke (in chapter 1: 1) mentions that there were many who had composed gospel narratives before him; but only two of these predecessors are known to us. John 21: 25 says that if all the acts of Jesus were to be recorded severally, the world would not be big enough to contain all that should be written. However, along with that one has to take into consideration John 20: 30-31: 'But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.' We do not need to have a complete record of all the events of Jesus's life. What is essential is that we should be accurately informed about his Person and his work; and in this respect the New Testament is a full and sufficient disclosure.

In the ancient world there were in circulation various *agrapha*, that is, remarks or injunctions not recorded in written form, sayings of Jesus not mentioned in the Gospels. Within the New Testament itself there is an instance of this at Acts 20: 35: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' In one New Testament manuscript (see p. 19) there is an additional passage at Luke 6: 5. It is a conversation between Jesus and a man who was working on the sabbath, the Jewish day of rest (Saturday), when working was forbidden. Jesus said to him: 'So long as you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if

you do not, then you are accursed and a breaker of the law.' Other agrapha are, for example: 'Be tried and trusty money-changers'; 'whoever is close to me is close to the fire; but whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom.' Paul wrote several letters which have not been preserved. He himself refers, in I Cor. 5 : 9, to an earlier letter addressed to the church there; and in Col. 4 : 16 he mentions a (lost) letter to Laodicea, a community in Asia Minor.

It would have been of great interest in many ways, had these writings also been preserved. It is even conceivable that through the discoveries being made in the Middle East one or other of them could still come to light. Thus in Egypt quite recently a 'Gospel of Thomas' was recovered which contains many discourses of Jesus; and one cannot rule out the possibility that some of his authentic sayings have thereby been passed down to us. Yet the Christian church has never felt the absence of material, or the failure to conserve it, to be a serious deprivation; for the books of the New Testament as we have them are enough to acquaint us fully with Jesus Christ as the one who brings the new Covenant. For faith in him—which is what they set out to awaken and to strengthen—and for fellowship with God through him, they are all that we need.

Besides the canonical books there are also a number of New Testament *apocrypha* (literally: hidden, secret things). Thus, for example, there is a 'First Gospel of James', which is about the early years of Mary, the mother of Jesus; a Gospel of Thomas, concerning the youth of Jesus; a Gospel of Peter, of which only a fragment has been preserved; Acts of Thomas, John and Peter; and a 'Revelation' of Peter, depicting the lot of the departed in the hereafter, which continued in use for a period among some local churches in the ancient world. The authors of these apocry-



# EN NOVVM TESTA

MENTVM. EX ERASMI ROTERODAMI RECOGNITIONE, iam quantum damus studiose lector, adiecta vulgata translatione, quo protinus ipsis oculis conferre possis, quid conueniat quid diffideat. Sic non sine graui tedio nostro, tibi tediu ademinus. Adiecta est Pauli peregrinatio Latina, cum praefatione Chrysostomi, in omnes epistolas Pauli. In annotationibus praeterquam quod autor exactiora reddidit omnia, magnam accessionem adiunxit ex Graecorum uoluminibus et uetustissimis exemplaribus Latinis, quae nuper est nactus. Cuius in recognoscendo summa diligentiam, nos in excudendo sumus imitati. Si proxima editio satisfecit, speramus hic Frobenium a Frobenio superatum. Accessit & locorum annotatum digestum index non aspernandus. Fruere, nostrisque conatibus laue.



*Si Christum uelis, ni  
Si Christum ducis, ni  
Medio critate.*

*En margaritum nobile  
Emest cupis discernere.*

BASILEAE ANNO M. D. XXVII.

*Contra uero, ex illiusmodi erigendo.*

Rylands papyrus fragments of John 18

Qum Ran, showing caves on the right where some of the Dead  
Sea Scrolls were discovered



phal writings wanted to fill in gaps or omissions of one kind or another which they claimed to have detected in the New Testament; or else they set out to propagate their own ideas under the apostolic flag. These activities had started as early as the 2nd century and continued well into the Middle Ages, and indeed even into the 20th century. Some of these writings have been extremely popular. The so-called Gospel of James, for instance, has had a big influence on the attitude adopted towards Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. They have, however, no official recognition. The author of the 'Acts of Paul', who on his own admission had written them round about A.D. 180 in honour of the apostle, actually lost his job through having done so. No one has ever given credence to this early Christian novel.

## 2. *Between the New Testament and ourselves*

Between the time when the New Testament was written and our own there stretches a period of nineteen hundred years. Nowadays the New Testament is read hardly at all in the original Greek, but in translation; and so something must be said about how this New Testament has come down to us.

The invention of printing in the 15th century proved to be of the utmost importance for the development of culture and civilisation in Europe. It made it possible to reproduce books mechanically in great numbers, for the first time. Previously, it had been necessary to copy everything laboriously by hand, letter by letter. Up to the 15th century 'books' meant 'manuscripts' and nothing else. This applied also to the New Testament.

The first printed edition of the Greek text was made at Basle in 1516 under the direction of a Dutchman, Erasmus.

Before that memorable year the Bible was widely known, of course, but in manuscript only.

Jesus Christ left nothing in writing. Whatever we know of him and about him we owe to the loving care of his disciples. In the Gospels they made a record of what he said and did. The very earliest, autograph copies, however, have not been preserved. Even the original letters of Paul—to Rome or to Corinth, for example—were lost. That must have happened early on; for even in ancient times there was never any mention made of the autograph originals of the apostles' writings. How then, in spite of everything, have their works reached us? They have been kept in existence through being copied—and then copied and copied again. The sum of New Testament manuscripts in the original tongue or in translation runs into many thousands.

When the Christian church started to grow and spread, the need immediately arose for people to know what the Lord Jesus had said and done—and that, not just directly by word of mouth but also by means of reliable recorded information. The need was felt especially strongly when the eye witnesses were no longer alive. These accounts were read out in the church assemblies along with the letters of the apostles (see, e.g., Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3; and a directive of Justin Martyr's *circa* A.D. 150 in Rome). Since Christian communities were often widely scattered, it did not suffice to have just one copy, deposited with one particular community. People wanted to possess the text themselves; and so further copies would be made. The more the number of Christians and of local churches increased, the more pressing became the need for New Testaments. The cost of providing copies was usually high; for the copying process took a long time and the materials were often expensive.

Only a few fragments of papyri, preserved in Egypt, have survived from the first three centuries, when Christianity was labouring under persecution. So far, the oldest piece is the remaining part of a leaf containing a few verses from John 18. This dates from about A.D. 125. Most of the other known fragments are contained in the Chester-Beatty papyri, dating from the 3rd century. Besides these there are numerous quotations from the works of church writers, which date from the very early centuries.

That these papyri come from Egypt, whereas no manuscripts of such an early period have survived in other parts of the Roman Empire, is attributable to the dry climate of that country, which helped to preserve the delicate material of the papyri.

When early in the 4th century under Constantine the Great (c. A.D. 320) the Christian church became a state church, it grew considerably in size, influence and prestige. The churches built at that time were large and splendid, and there was a demand for beautiful bibles too. From then on the number of copies was greatly increased. Many handsome manuscripts of the complete New Testament, with elegant lettering on hard-wearing parchment, date from that period—for instance, the Codex Sinaiticus (British Museum, London) and the Codex Vaticanus (Vatican Library, Rome). We have at present a total of more than 3,000 manuscripts in New Testament Greek. They date from the period between the 4th and the 15th centuries and are in the keeping of various churches, monasteries and, more especially, libraries.

Christianity soon spread rapidly to areas where Greek was not spoken; for although a great many people within the Roman Empire were familiar enough with the Greek language, this was not the case in the country districts of Syria, Egypt and North Africa generally. The gospel had

been proclaimed there too; and as all were to hear in their own tongue the mighty works of God (cf. Acts 2 : 8, 11), *translations* were made. This work had been started by the close of the 2nd century; but who the translators were we do not know. It was expansion eastwards, into the Orient, that made translation into so many different languages necessary. In the West Latin became the sole language of the church; and so a translation into that tongue—and that only—sufficed. It was not until the late Middle Ages that here in the West texts translated into the national vernaculars came into being. The Latin translation was a revision of several forerunners—the Old Latin versions, as they are called. There were so many of these and most of them exhibited so many discrepancies in their rendering of the text that the need was felt for a measure of uniformity. The correcting was done by that very learned father of the church, Jerome (=Hieronymus: c. A.D. 400); and his work was known as the *Vulgate* (*vulgata*, i.e. generally or universally propagated), because this version was accepted throughout the church in Western Europe to the exclusion of all others. The Vulgate has been of first importance in that the Roman Catholic Church regarded and used it as the church's official text, for centuries ignoring the original Greek text almost entirely.

Because they were intended for God's service, great care nearly always went to the making of these manuscripts. During the Middle Ages especially they were often provided with beautiful illustrations and were expensively bound.

However, when such manuscripts are compared with one another, all sorts of discrepancies become apparent. To anybody who has ever had to copy anything this is quite understandable. During the copying, for example, several letters might not be read accurately; or they could be taken down from dictation, in which case they might be

misheard. And so mistakes would occur. Each time somebody made yet further copies of these manuscripts the mistakes would be carried over too—and there was always the possibility that fresh ones would creep in. Also, certain things were added as time went on: as with Matt. 6 : 13 and I John 5 : 7. Thus the more recent the manuscript, the greater the chance that mistakes would be incorporated. As so many manuscripts are available, it is possible to track down such mistakes by checking one reading against another. This is the task of what is known as textual criticism. However, although these discrepant readings in the manuscripts often help to throw light on particular points, they in no way alter the essential core of the New Testament proclamation. The very multiplicity and age of the manuscripts serve to bring out the trustworthiness of the tradition.

The Bible was not originally divided up by the authors into chapter and verse, as it generally is today. That was done later, so as to make it easier to refer to individual texts. The division into chapters derives from Stephen Langton, d. 1228; that into verses was carried out by R. Stephanus for his printed text of 1551.

So far as translations are concerned, one needs to remember that even the most literal translation can never be a straight reproduction of the original. Every language has its peculiar constructions, word-combinations and nuances of meaning which cannot be transferred to another language exactly as they stand—as anyone will know who has ever had to express anything in a foreign language or has himself done any translating. However scrupulous one may be in trying to reproduce the meaning, a difference of some sort there will always be. This sometimes comes out very clearly when several translations are compared together (see p. 25).

In the Middle Ages therefore the New Testament was by no means an unfamiliar book. It was read aloud in monasteries and churches, even though few people had one in their homes. But in the West they had to rely almost entirely on translated versions, until Erasmus's edition of 1516 (see p. 17) restored a knowledge of the original text. The appearance of that edition coincided with two great movements of the time, Humanism (the Renaissance) and the Reformation. Both were for getting back 'to the sources', Humanism in order to recover the classical period, and the Reformation in order to take the measure of the contemporary church by the Scriptures and in so doing to purge it and purify it. The high esteem in which Greek had once more come to be held also helped to advance the study of the New Testament.

One of the basic aims of the Reformation was to make a knowledge of the Bible accessible to all; and one of Luther's first acts as a reformer was to make a German translation of the New Testament (1523).

This work has had a great influence, particularly in Germany where it is still regularly used by the church (with certain modifications), but also further afield. Translations into the vernacular appeared simultaneously in France, Britain and The Netherlands. In England, Wycliffe's Bible (based on the Latin text) had appeared as early as 1382-88; but William Tyndale was the first to translate the New Testament direct from the Greek, printing his version at Cologne (1525) and Worms (1526). He also translated parts of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. Another important translation, although not out of the original tongues, was that commonly attributed to Miles Coverdale (1535), on which the English *Book of Common Prayer* has drawn for its version of the Old Testament Psalms. Several other translations or editions in English were made during



the 16th century: among them, Matthew and Taverner's Bible (1537-39); the Great Bible, or 'Cranmer's Bible' (1539), prepared under the auspices of King Henry VIII; and the 'Bishops' Bible' of 1568, an edition intended by Archbishop Parker to counteract the influence of the Calvinistic Genevan Bible, printed at Geneva by refugee reformers from England in 1560. Then the Roman Catholics prepared a translation, known as the Douai Version; first of the New Testament (1582) and later of the Old Testament (1609-10). Of all these 16th-century versions Tyndale's was to prove the most influential in that it provided a basis for the famous 'Authorized Version' of 1611 (generally known in the U.S.A. as the King James's Bible). Even today the Authorized Version of the Old and New Testaments is probably the most widely used by churches in the majority of English-speaking countries. It resulted from a conference convened in 1604 by King James I at Hampton Court. The Authorized Version was not, strictly speaking, a new translation but a revision of Tyndale's text with modifications from Wycliffe and other sources. It established itself as a classic work of English literature, although oddly enough it was never officially 'authorized'.

Two and a half centuries were to pass before a further revision of the Bible in English—in the light of newly discovered manuscripts—was undertaken by the Church of England. The work was begun in 1870 and issued in a Revised Text of both Testaments (New Testament, 1881; Old Testament, 1884). Owing to the progress made by scholars in knowledge of the ancient Hebrew, the Revised Old Testament text was especially valuable and significant. The (American) Revised Standard Version (New Testament, 1946; Old Testament, 1952) is the latest text to be based on the Authorized Version and hence ultimately on

Tyndale's Bible. It is however a radical revision, couched in dignified but modern English.

The 20th century has seen a spate of new translations of the one Testament or the other into the various European languages. These have been carried out in some cases by teams or panels of experts, in others by individual scholars—in English, notably by Moffatt, Weymouth, Rieu, Knox (Roman Catholic) and Phillips. They vary markedly in style and in quality of scholarship.

Of outstanding importance is the *New English Bible* (New Testament only, 1961; Old Testament not yet published). It has been produced by committees of scholars, working closely together over a period of several years; and it is a completely new translation, in modern English, based on the best Greek manuscripts available. There were three reasons why such an undertaking proved to be necessary: first, English had changed considerably during the period since 1611, as anyone can see who compares the language of Shakespeare, or even of Milton, with the English in current use today; second, thanks chiefly to the research done during the 19th and 20th centuries, our knowledge of Greek and of the world of the New Testament has been very much advanced, so making possible a better rendering of the original; third, the Greek text used in the 16th and 17th centuries had been based on late mediæval manuscripts, whereas the really ancient manuscripts (see pp. 17-19) have only been made available to us as the result of research done since the middle of the 19th century. Pains-taking investigation has yielded a much purer text of the Greek New Testament than anything that was to be had, say, three hundred years ago; and it is obviously enormously valuable to be able to read the New Testament in an easily intelligible form which follows the original as clearly and closely as possible.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is perhaps not irrelevant at this point to mention some translations into other languages; for they give one an indication of what other European Christians are using: Germany: Weizsäcker, Menge, *Zürcher Bibel*; France: Segond, *La Bible de Jérusalem* (R.C.); The Netherlands: *de Statenvertaling* (States' Version: 1637), *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* (Version of the New Testament, 1939).

Then too it is often a profitable exercise to use a number of different versions (even if in a foreign language) alongside one another. Since one has to concentrate on every word—instead of hearing merely a succession of sounds—the meaning of a text can reveal itself in a fresh and surprising way.

## II. *The Background to the New Testament*

### 1. *The world of the New Testament*

Jesus Christ lived in Palestine, as did his disciples—at first. Later, however, in response to his command, they brought the message of Christ to other countries: Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. These, taken together, comprise the world of the New Testament. They represent too a considerable part of the *Oikoumenè*, that is, of the civilised world of those days.

In the first century of our era all these countries, along with Egypt, North Africa, France (Gaul) and Spain, formed a single political empire. The mighty *Imperium Romanum* embraced them all.

Although Egypt bordered so closely on Palestine, the New Testament has remarkably little to say about it, because it is concerned first and foremost with the activities of Christ's apostles—and they did not actually work in Egypt. Nor does the New Testament give us a complete account of the spread of Christianity up to the close of the 1st century. Paul did perhaps go to Spain, as he had planned (Rom. 15 : 28); but if so, we know nothing of his stay there. So far as we know, Christianity did not reach other parts of the empire until after the time of the apostles. Nothing at all definite is known, either, about the spread of Christianity beyond the imperial frontiers to the East

(Mesopotamia). I Pet. 5 : 13 possibly refers to a visit by the apostle Peter to Babylon (but this place-name is widely held to be a pseudonym for Rome). Tradition has it that the apostle Thomas went to live in those parts—hence the name of the so-called ‘Thomas Christians’ who are to be found in India today. But the Bible itself knows nothing of this.

What it amounts to is that the New Testament is concerned with the countries bordering on the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, to the east and north. The area which they constitute is not in every respect identical with that featured in the Old Testament; for during the centuries dividing the Old Testament from the New great changes had made themselves felt in several spheres. The Old Testament spans a period when the cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt dominated the (Mediterranean) world, whereas by New Testament times the civilisation of Greece was more or less prevalent everywhere. Rome, of course, was by then the ruling power.

To understand the New Testament properly one needs to know something of what life was like in the Graeco-Roman world and to study in particular the one small corner of it known as Palestine. The whole earthly career of Jesus Christ is bound up with that country; and as the Jews within the Roman Empire were in many respects an exception to the general rule, they demand very special consideration.

## 2. *The Graeco-Roman world*

At the battle of Actium (on the west coast of Greece) in 31 B.C. Octavian defeated Anthony. Anthony, once Octavian’s ally but now his rival, had planned to build himself an empire in the East in company with the Egyptian princess, Cleopatra, and then, from Egypt, to rule the

world. Octavian's victory put an end to that idea. The East became finally subject to Rome. The western and eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea area came under a single government and were thereafter to remain politically united for some hundreds of years. That was to be a circumstance of paramount importance to the spread of the gospel.

Taking the title of Augustus (literally, Eminence or Exalted One; Luke 2 : 1), Octavian ruled over this vast area as the first Roman emperor (Cæsar), from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. His government put an end to the bloody civil wars which had afflicted the world in the 1st century B.C. He restored peace and order within his huge empire and took steps to abolish piracy at sea. People were grateful for the all-round advantages which they enjoyed through the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace, and revered Augustus as the Deliverer (Saviour). Under conditions of relative security it was possible for trade to develop and for industry and agriculture to prosper.

Within the one empire there lived a great variety of peoples and nations, each with its own history and religion and distinctive genius. The Greeks were quite different from the Egyptians, the Syrians from the Romans; yet despite all these differences—of language, for example (see Acts 14 : 11; 21 : 37, 40; Rev. 5 : 9)—there was a good deal of communication and mixing among the various peoples. In the East the process had begun already some time before, but during this period it was greatly accelerated. Trade gave men a motive for travelling abroad; and so places like Alexandria and Corinth—but above all Rome itself—attracted people from every quarter of the empire. In the Acts one sees again and again how travel was taken as a matter of course, in spite of the absence of modern means of transport.

Government, though centralised and administered from Rome, was put into effect by 'governors' (cf. Luke 2 : 2; I Pet. 2 : 13), such as Pilate in Judæa (see pp. 86, 87) and Gallio in Greece (Acts 18 : 12). Besides these there were various local authorities with limited powers. The Roman armies were stationed more especially along the frontiers of the empire to ward off the attacks of the 'barbarians'; but in a country like Palestine, which was pretty unruly, there would also be a garrison force (see, e.g., Luke 7 : 1 ff.; Acts 10 : 1). The rights of a Roman citizen afforded him protection as well as a number of privileges (see Acts 16 : 37-38; 22 : 25-26; 25 : 11) which were, however, denied to subject peoples, even when they lived within the empire. On certain days the courts would sit in judgment (Acts 18 : 12; 19 : 38); but even so, for all who were in subjection the arm of the law was short. That was particularly so with regard to the taxes or tribute-monies, which were farmed out for collection to the highest bidders. These *rentiers* in turn leased their right to collect to the 'publicans'; and both groups were out to feather their nest as well as they could by amassing profits far in excess of their rental costs. In consequence of this system the general run of people were always being fleeced (Luke 3 : 13; 19 : 1 ff.).

In the spheres of learning and culture, however, it was the Greeks who called the tune; for 'conquered Greece had captivated her conquerors.' The Greek language, both spoken and written, was used, more or less correctly, throughout the empire and even in Rome itself. The East was thoroughly hellenized—in the cities at any rate, if not so much in the rural areas; and this influence was to be seen in urban architecture, in the decorative arts and in predominant styles of living. The fact that so many peoples could be reached through one language made the

proclamation of the gospel very much more effective than it would otherwise have been.

Of the many cities within the empire the following at least would have to be included in any list of the principal centres:

*Rome*: a town of several millions on the Tiber, the centre of government, where all the threads of the great empire converged upon the imperial palace; a city of much commerce and enormous wealth (Rev. 18 : 11 ff.).

*Corinth*: 'nestling upon two oceans', a transit port for merchandise passing from East to West and vice versa, notorious for its licentious ways (cf. Acts 18 and Paul's letters to the church there).

*Ephesus*: capital of the province of Asia, lying at the start (or the end) of the great trade-route running right across Asia Minor: renowned for its temple of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19).

*Antioch*: (in Syria—there were a lot of places bearing that name) the third city of the empire with a population of something like 800,000 inhabitants; the main caravan routes to Mesopotamia and Syria led past this town (cf. Acts 11 : 19 ff., 13 : 1 ff.).

*Alexandria*: chief city of Egypt and second city of the empire, famous for the library at the 'Museum'. Business and learning both flourished there. It was a major port of shipment for grain; for Egypt was the granary of Rome (cf. Acts 27 : 6 ff., 28 : 11).

In the centre of each town there would invariably be a market-place (the *agora*), where stood the principal public buildings and shops; a few broad main streets ran out of this, although for the rest the streets were narrow. The houses would be provided with small windows against the excessive glare and heat of the sun, just as they are today



in that part of the world. In the villages living-conditions were extremely primitive. The Romans generally took care to ensure that there was a good water supply—something that in those regions was a prime necessary of existence. For the majority of people life was a frugal enough business; they kept themselves fed on bread, olives and fish. The customary drink was wine. No town of any importance would be without its sites for sport and contests (in music as well as running and so forth; the victor receiving a 'crown' or wreath—see I Cor. 9 : 24 ff.; Heb. 12 : 1; Rev. 2 : 10). The bloody, gladiatorial games were especially dear to the Romans; and the chariot races too were a great public attraction. In the huge theatres tragedies and comedies were presented before crowded audiences.

There was extreme social inequality. Especially in the big towns extravagance and luxury existed cheek by jowl with grinding poverty. Large numbers of people found themselves in a position of *slavery* and thus completely at the mercy of their owners (cf. Philemon; I Pet. 2 : 18 ff.). Wars were one way of obtaining slaves, and there was a flourishing trade in this human merchandise. These slaves worked in their masters' houses or on their estates; and there were cases of slaves enjoying a large measure of freedom, while some were exceptionally well educated. Through the clemency of his owner a slave might be set free, but even then he was still to some extent under obligation to his former lord and master. For the rich, on the other hand, living was sumptuous indeed; East and West alike supplied them with varieties of timber, metals, luxury goods and choice foods. It was the upper crust of society in particular that benefited from an increasing prosperity.

It is difficult to give in a few words and for such a vast

area a fair impression of what life was like in the moral sphere; for in that respect there was great diversity. It largely depended on the convictions and attitude of the individual. There were people whose manner of life was depraved in the extreme; yet there were others who lived modestly and whose conduct was beyond reproach. Deplorable relationships between men and women, which led often to divorce, existed side by side with really happy and successful marriages. One ought not to generalize simply on the basis of certain critical pronouncements occurring here and there in Paul's letters. When one reads—as one frequently does—this or that account of life under the Cæsars, one has to bear in mind that such descriptions are more often than not the work of satirists who were out to paint the picture as black as they could.

Rome gave to women a more important status than Greece had done. Although they did not take part in public life like the men, they were by no means cooped up in harems, either. During infancy the children's upbringing lay with the mother in the home, and only later on with the father. A lot of well-to-do families preferred to leave them in the hands of 'pedagogues' (cf. Gal. 3 : 24: a custodian, who was often a slave). Education was not compulsory. Where it was wanted, one could send one's son to a 'teacher' to receive instruction in a variety of subjects, the most valued of which would be oratory. The Greeks led the field in this sphere of education. Indeed the antithesis between 'Greek' and 'barbarian' had ceased to be a national distinction and had become a cultural one, the difference between being 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' (cf. Col. 3 : 11).

As soon as the Mediterranean Sea had become a Roman 'inland waterway' and protection was assured, transport

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 ΤΡΙΣ ΑΡΤΟΥΣ ΕΙΠΩ

ἰσχυρὴν  
 διακονίαν  
 τοῦ π  
 ατρὸς



The title-page from the Great Bible of 1539, showing Henry VIII and Cranmer distributing Bibles

and trade came into their own. Transport was partly by means of large sea-going freighters (Acts 27 : 2, 6) or else by coasters. Paul regularly made use of ships on his travels (see, e.g., Acts 16 : 11; 18 : 18, 21; 20 : 6, 13 ff.). These journeys could take place only during the spring and summer, because the storms of autumn and winter made it extremely dangerous for ships without navigational instruments (Acts 27 : 9 ff.). Paul gives a vivid account (in II Cor. 11 : 25 ff.) of all the hardships he had to put up with on his travels. Yet in spite of the dangers there was much coming and going between the major ports of the empire, such as Alexandria, Ephesus, the transit port of Corinth and Ostia (the port for Rome). For overland traffic there were the great roads which the Romans were at pains to construct and maintain, partly of course for military purposes. When the rich made a journey they used carriages (Acts 8 : 28 ff.) or were carried in litters; other people had to walk or go by mule. No organized postal service existed—the imperial post was not meant for the private citizen. In the countries referred to in the New Testament the terrain is very mountainous, with not many woods or forests. Journeys took a long time and were exhausting even for the native inhabitants of the region; and one could only travel by daylight. All these difficulties have to be borne in mind when one is trying to get a proper idea of what was achieved by Paul and his companions. Merchandise was also transported by mule and, particularly in the East, by camel.

Not only did people travel and goods pass from one place to another, but ideas too—philosophical and theological ideas—spread throughout the Roman empire; they were by no means confined to, say, one particular locality. In many towns teachers of philosophy were to be seen.

Some ran their own 'academies', whilst others wandered from place to place. The priests and priestesses of exotic religious cults were to be found everywhere. It was as one of these that Paul was received in Athens (Acts 17: 17 ff.).

The most striking thing about philosophy under the empire was its concern to answer the question: in what does man's true happiness consist? The philosophers were in many respects spiritual counsellors—the shepherds of souls. The 'school' whose bearing and behaviour made them most conspicuous was that of the *Cynics* (literally, 'the currish ones'). According to them a human being would find happiness only if he disassociated himself from civilisation as a whole and thus strove to live as much as possible in accordance with 'nature'. They were well known for the scathing criticism in which they indulged and for their uninhibited conduct generally. Most influential of all was the philosophical system of the *Stoa*—(literally, the Colonnade: so called after the spot in Athens where the first advocates of this philosophy used to congregate; see Acts 17: 18). According to this doctrine the whole universe is permeated by a divine Reason, a highly rarified matter. Men are part and parcel of this; and they live best by submitting themselves voluntarily to the inescapable law of that Reason. They must cultivate an inner detachment from the impact of external forces, good or evil, and from the vicissitudes of Fortune. At the deepest level of their being all men are equal. This world, the Stoics argued, is in reality a single entity; and the various forms of religion and myths or stories of the gods are in fact so many symbolic representations of a single cosmic Reason. For the Stoic the most powerful idea governing the conduct of life was a principle of duty.

The Stoic philosophy imbued men with strength of

character and had a profound influence both during this period and later (even with the Christian church). The terms used in some of the *dicta* of Stoicism make them appear closely akin to utterances in the New Testament. This however is more consonance than real identity of content, an agreement more of sound than of sense; for there is a radical difference here. The Stoa upholds an idea of God which is not that of the New Testament, and in consequence it takes a different view of man too (as being part of the 'divine being' and not a creature of God; as being 'in error', but not in a state of disobedience towards God).

There were other 'schools' besides these, among them the *Epicureans* (called after their mentor, Epicurus), for whom the loftiest ideal was the attainment of pleasure; the *Sceptics* (from *skepsis*, meaning 'reflection' or 'enquiry'), who doubted the possibility of sure knowledge; the *Eclectics*, who wanted to select and combine what was best from various systems (from *eklelego*: 'I pick out').

These differing answers to the question as to what conduces to true happiness in life show how men everywhere were looking for some spiritual foundation. They were dissatisfied with their ordinary, day-to-day existence and merely academic knowledge, and yearned for something to hold on to.

In the religious sphere it was the same. Here, there and everywhere stood the sanctuaries of the old Greek and Roman gods—the temples of Zeus, Athènè, Apollo and the rest—where sacrifices were still offered. The ancient stories of the gods were kept alive in theatre, school and home; but all kinds of impersonal forces, such as *Tyche* (Fate), were worshipped too. Religious ceremonies were the concern of the civic or state authorities (cf. Acts 19 : 23 ff.), and the sacrifices made to these deities were intended

to allay their anger or enlist their help. Veneration of the gods guaranteed the continued well-being of city and state. To this or that place of pilgrimage the sick would come—for example, to Epidaurus—in order to experience the healing power of Asclepius.

Contact between different races—and especially with peoples like the Egyptians and the Syrians, with their age-old mystery religions—made men wonder about the status of the various deities. However, in a world where a multiplicity of gods was the accepted thing (polytheism) this presented no great difficulty. One either equated and identified the strange gods with one's own, or simply adopted the newcomers into one's own circle of deities. The outcome of this is what is known as *syncretism* (a 'mixing together'). It meant that in principle people acknowledged one another's gods on a reciprocal basis. The divine names might vary; but one god could be called by many names. Thus men were prepared to reverence the various gods in a spirit of tolerance. For a school of thought like Stoicism this lent force to the idea that all these gods were actually expressions of one divine power and that they served as pointers to its manifold activities. By *allegorizing* them—that is, by taking the words to mean something other than what they say—people were able to 'explain' the ancient stories of the gods and to discover in them all kinds of abstruse philosophical pronouncements regarding the supreme being. It was above all in the sun, which casts its light upon all, that they were inclined to discover a symbol of the one universal power.

It is a fact that atheism—a total rejection of the gods—was almost unknown in the ancient world. Men held the traditional forms and ceremonies in respect, even though some—the Epicureans, for instance—took the view that the gods had no dealings with the world of men. On the



question of whether there was a hereafter and whether men continued to exist after death, opinion was very much divided.

Several *oriental religions*, such as those of the Egyptian Isis and of the Magna Mater (the Great Mother), became more and more popular and influential as the era advanced. These cults were 'mysteries' (clandestine ceremonies), like that of Eleusis in Greece. After a period of preparation each candidate was initiated at a special ceremony and so was admitted to his share in the destiny of the dying and rising god. These oriental rites proved attractive and did a good deal to satisfy the widespread longing for personal assurance about the after life. They also helped to bind the devotees firmly together 'in the bonds of fellowship', sometimes by means of the sacred meal, which was a characteristic feature of the cult of the Egyptian Serapis, for example, and of many other mystery religions. Astrology (divining the message of the stars) originated in Babylonia, but very quickly spread further afield. Those who practised it maintained a grossly fatalistic doctrine. They contended that everything is determined by a kind of necessity and that the planetary powers exercise a positive influence over life in this sublunary world (a man may be born, say, under a 'lucky star'). It was supposed that the stars move in a fixed course from which they never deviate; so that if one had the required knowledge, one could predict what the outcome of anything would be. Considerable power was also ascribed to magic (or sorcery). By the use of spells the magician could in some obscure way cause certain specific things to happen. It was believed that by cryptic invocations and the use of special formulas one could dispel sickness or influence the course of future events (see e.g., Acts 8:9 ff.; 13:6 ff.; 19:13 ff.).

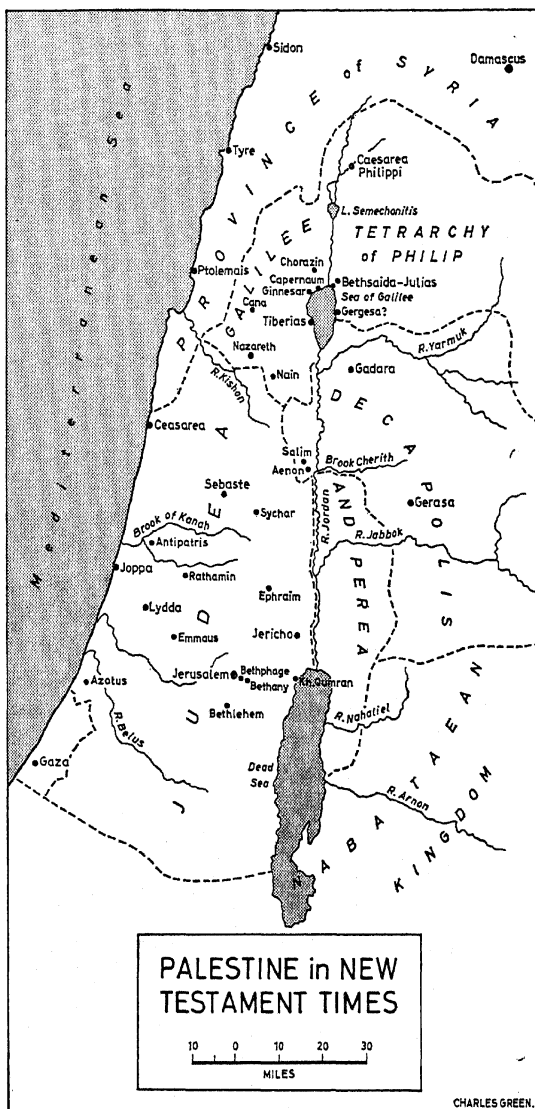
## THE NEW TESTAMENT

In face of such a multiplicity of races and religions it was vital to the unity of the empire that there should be some positive common bond: and that was provided by the *emperor cult*. Kings had for long been venerated in the East as embodiments of the gods; they were the deliverers or saviours. In Rome there had been opposition to this idea. Originally, the only persons worshipped there as divine were deceased princes; but in the East they did not wait until a ruler had died. The Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) caused himself to be worshipped as 'Lord and God' even during his lifetime. Resistance to this emperor-worship forms one of the chief issues in the last book of the Bible.

We have now taken a look at some of the elements that make up the highly variegated world of the first century of our era. It is a picture which changes aspect a good deal, according to the time and place one has in view. It would appear from all this that a number of factors were favourable to the spread of the gospel—but also that this message about Jesus Christ, as it made its way in the world, inevitably came in contact with all kinds of long-established religious usages and customs and came up against a lot of competitors all endeavouring to convince men and women of the truth of their claims. Then as now the encounter with Jesus Christ called for a decision: to receive or to reject him.

### 3. *The Jewish world*

In a special sense the background to the New Testament was *Palestine*. There Jesus lived and worked during his life on earth; and there the earliest preachers of the gospel grew up. Jesus himself had said that 'salvation is of the Jews' (John 4 : 22). Without some knowledge of Jewry



at that period the message of the New Testament is not to be understood.

Palestine was at that time divided into three parts: Judæa, with Jerusalem as its capital; Samaria, where lived a separate religious community (see p. 48); and Galilee, with Capernaum as its principal town. On the further side of the Jordan lay Peræa or Transjordan; and through it there ran a road from Judæa to Galilee, circumventing Samaria, Matt. 19:1 (but of course people took the shortest route through Samaria as well, Luke 9:51). Most of the population were small farmers and, on the Sea of Galilee, fishermen. In Jerusalem stood the temple, to which crowds of people came on pilgrimage—a major source of revenue! All things considered, the economy was in a pretty bad way.

For the Jews Palestine with its temple was the 'holy land' which, the Old Testament declared, had been given by God to the people of Israel for their inheritance, so that the nation might serve God there according to the requirements of his Law. They were conscious of being the 'chosen people' (Deut. 7:6). Their faith in the one true God (monotheism) distinguished them from the surrounding peoples who were polytheists, worshipping many gods.

This holy land had been stubbornly defended against the invader; but it turned out that militarily the Jews were not strong enough to achieve any lasting success. In 63 B.C., during his conquest of Syria, the Roman general Pompey had taken Jerusalem and, though a heathen, had even forced his way into the holiest part of the temple. Since then Palestine had been a component part of the Roman empire. This meant that in Jewish eyes not only had their fatherland become 'occupied territory', but the heathen had dominion over it. Yet although the battle was lost in a military sense, spiritual resistance continued.

In religious matters the Romans were tolerant; they did not seek to impose their own religion. But the Jews, hemmed about by the prevailing hellenistic culture, did their utmost to preserve their distinctive character and to avoid falling into syncretism (see p. 36). A few centres of hellenism did stand on Palestinian soil, it is true—towns such as Tiberias and the port of Cæsarea—but their influence was a superficial one.

In 37 B.C. a prince from neighbouring Edom, a man called Herod, had seized the throne. He was connected by marriage with the genuine Jewish royal house, but was himself no full-blooded Jew. In the struggle between Anthony and Octavian (see p. 27) he was at first compelled to side with the former; but after Octavian's victory he was clever enough to get himself out of trouble. As a *rex socius* (a confederate ruler) he remained in control until 4 B.C. and ruled like a typical oriental despot (cf. Matt. 2). His private life was far from being a happy one. Conscious of being an intruder, he tried to keep on a good footing with the Jews, and rebuilt the temple, making it more splendid than ever before (John 2 : 20). He also attempted to make himself popular beyond Palestine with the hellenists, and was responsible for building the coastal town of Cæsarea, called after the Roman emperor. His offspring played a major role in the history of the Jewish people during the New Testament period.

Ten years after Herod's death Judæa and Samaria became an imperial province (A.D. 6), and garrisons were stationed in a number of places to maintain order (Luke 7 : 1 ff.; Acts 21 : 31 ff.). The governors resided at Cæsarea (Acts 23 : 23 ff.) and came only on special occasions to Jerusalem. Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36) is the most famous of them, because the ministry and death of Jesus happened during his period of office (Luke 3 : 1; Mark 15 and parallels), and

Pilate's behaviour was decidedly anti-Jewish (see Luke 13 : 1). Galilee and Transjordan were ruled for a long time (A.D. 4-36) by Herod Antipas (cf. Mark 6 : 17 and parallels; Luke 23 : 8 ff.); and for a brief spell—between A.D. 41 and 44—Palestine was reunified under Herod Agrippa I, an adventurer who, having the ear of the Emperor Caligula, was able to intervene on the Jews' behalf and to prevent an image of the emperor from being set up inside the temple (see Acts 12 on this man). His nephew, Herod Agrippa II (see Acts 25 : 13 ff. and ch. 26), had little temporal power, but exercised some influence on Jewish religious life through his appointment of the high priests. In A.D. 44 Claudius Cæsar put the whole of Palestine once more under the control of procurators (Roman governors), two of whom—Felix and Festus—are known to us from the New Testament (see Acts 23-26). The situation at that time was one of mounting tension. There were repeated uprisings on the part of the Sicarii (i.e. 'dagger-men': cf. 'robbers', Mark 15 : 7, 27; Acts 5 : 36 f.), a sort of underground movement. In A.D. 67 this blazed up into armed and open resistance and the outbreak of the great Jewish war (A.D. 67-70), which after some initial successes for the Jews ended with the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by Titus, son of Vespasian. Large numbers of Jews were then killed or sold into slavery (cf. Luke 21 : 20 ff.). The 9th Ab (our August), the day on which the temple went up in flames, has ever since been the Jews' day of mourning for the end of their existence as an independent nation. 'We have nothing left but the Law and our Father in heaven'—so runs the lament of a Jewish minstrel of that time. Since then the Jews have been a nation in exile.

Despite oppression and the complete and final destruction of their temple, the Jewish people were not a spent force.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

The secret of their vitality lay in their religion. To that they owed their very existence as a nation, and in times of defeat and desolation it remained still their source of strength. The Holy Scripture (the Old Testament) was God's revelation to his people, the means by which they were to learn of his will. Place of honour was given to the first five books, the Law of Moses; for in these were imparted the rules of religious and moral life (cf. Ps. 119). The historical and prophetic books told how Israel had fared during periods of constancy and of defection. It was a story of both blessing and chastisement; and the prophetic writings in particular contained promises which kept alive the hope that if the nation were but to live wholly according to God's commandments, it could yet be restored. The Psalms spoke of the sovereign power of God and the pitiableness of men. A book such as Proverbs gave practical directions for the conduct of all the affairs of life.

*Jerusalem* was the earthly centre of the Jewish people. There stood the temple, of which God had promised that he himself would dwell there among his people; and in it ritual worship was enacted according to the injunctions of the Law. The sacrifices offered there brought atonement with God for the transgressions committed against him; and on the great feasts (of Passover, Pentecost and the Tabernacles) big crowds of pilgrims gathered there, mainly from Palestine but also from other parts of the world (cf. Luke 2 : 41 ff.; John 7 : 10; Acts 8 : 27). The principal feast in this respect was the Passover, including the Passover meal at which the people celebrated the exodus from Egypt and their release from slavery. That feast of deliverance marked the beginnings of Israel's existence as a nation and pointed to the deliverance yet to come. Of major

importance too were the Great Day of Atonement and the New Year festival (in late September), because those occasions spoke of God's righteousness in judging men and of their guilt before him.

As only one temple was permitted (Deut. 12 : 5) and not all Jews lived in the vicinity of Jerusalem, other places came into use, where people could assemble on the weekly sabbath (i.e. rest-day, Saturday; Exod. 20 : 8-11); and these were known as *synagogues* (a Greek word meaning 'assemblies'). No sacrifice was offered there; the central activity was the reading of God's Law. The whole of the Law, from Genesis 1 to Deuteronomy 34, was read through in consecutive parts and in a fixed cycle. A suitable extract from the Prophets was read in conjunction with this; and a sermon of some sort might be delivered too (see Luke 4 : 14 ff.; Acts 13 : 15 ff.). Along with reading and exposition of the Holy Scripture public prayer formed a major part of the service.

The life of Jewry as a whole—and not just on the sabbath—naturally centred around the Law of Moses. Was it not the means by which the one true God had made himself known to Israel? Did it not enshrine all those precepts which Israel, as the people of the 'Covenant', must observe if she were to obtain God's blessing and escape his malediction (Lev. 26; Deut. 28)? Here were the commandments governing all intercourse with God and with men. In a series of injunctions it was laid down how Israel was to be a 'clean' nation: the people were to abstain from certain foods; they were to keep the sabbath; they were forbidden to be on intimate terms with the heathen; they were obliged to eschew fornication and idolatry, because everything 'unclean' came between God and Israel. Besides all this they were enjoined to care for the poor, the widow and the orphan—a class of persons who



in the East had much to suffer and endure. The Law therefore governed not only their religious conduct but their moral and social life as well.

This Law was given centuries before the New Testament period; and in the meantime circumstances had changed. All sorts of questions had cropped up as to how certain terms were to be construed (see, e.g., Luke 10 : 29: who is the 'neighbour' spoken of in Lev. 19 : 18? The fellow Israelite or the non-Jew as well?). Because it was obligatory to carry out God's commandments in precise detail, it was essential to know precisely what those commandments were. That is why close study of the Law was so important. It was the *Scribes* (sometimes called 'teachers' or 'rabbis') who devoted themselves to this work. They gathered round them groups of pupils (disciples, cf. Acts 22 : 3, and see p. 71); and they decided what was the correct interpretation of this or that item of the Law. Consequently they were held in the greatest esteem.

The highest judicial authority among the Jews was the *Sanhedrin* (a loan-word from the Greek, meaning 'a council or court of law'). It was made up of seventy distinguished lawyers and priests under the presidency of the High Priest. The Romans had granted this body a certain measure of independence and the right to give a ruling on a number of religious and even social questions; for the Romans were content to allow as much scope as possible to subject peoples in maintaining their local customs. Whether the Sanhedrin had the right to exact the death penalty, however, is an open question (Matt. 26 : 57 ff.).

Education among the Jews was wholly concerned with teaching and learning how to 'keep the Law'. The adults set an example in this respect; and to this end children were taught to read. As soon as he entered upon his thirteenth year a boy was in duty bound to fulfil the com-

mandments in every respect. The synagogue was also known as 'the house of learning'. What the Greeks put first and foremost—a fluent command of language, sport and philosophy—was not merely neglected by the Jews, but even condemned.

Because everything centred on the Law in this way, life for the Jew was very much an affair of rules and regulations. People would speak of the 'yoke of the Law' or of the 'yoke of the kingdom of God'—the 'yoke' here being thought of, not as a grievous burden of some kind, but as the bond holding the team together as one. Transgression of the Law was almost a foregone conclusion in cases where a man did not know exactly what was allowed and what forbidden; and this could sometimes degenerate into mere hair-splitting: for instance, over the question of doing work on the sabbath. But the aim and object of it all was to preserve the Jewish people as a 'holy' nation in the sight of their God. Trespasses and sins were done away by the sacrifices and especially by the repentance (*teshūba*, i.e. 'turning back', 'return') of the transgressors.

Many of the rabbis' discussions were subsequently (after A.D. 150) brought together in the *Mishna* (i.e. 'Repetition' of the Law) which together with annotations is included in the *Talmud*. This still forms the basis of religious life for orthodox Jews.

To confess the One and Only God and to obey his Law—such were the central tenets of Judaism. Yet there was still plenty of room for differences of interpretation. Some rabbis were much stricter than others. In the New Testament period there were three sects that attracted particular attention. Two of these are to be met with in the New Testament itself: namely, the *Pharisees* and the *Sadducees*. Acts 23:8 mentions some of the points of difference between them: e.g. acceptance or rejection of belief in the

resurrection of the dead; disagreement about the existence of angels. The Sadducees (probably: 'the lineage of Zadok', priest under Solomon) were to be found principally among the chief priests and their connections, whereas the Pharisees (the 'separated ones') had a good deal of influence with the ordinary people. The Sadducees accepted only the Mosaic Law. It followed from their disbelief in the resurrection (cf. Mark 12 : 18 ff.) that in their view there could be no divine judgment after this life; and that of course had a considerable bearing on their whole behaviour. In their observance of the commandments the Pharisees were painstakingly correct; and they often attached greater value to outward form than to an action performed in the true spirit of the Law (cf. Matt. 23; Mark 7 : 1 ff.). Then there were the *Essenes* (probably, 'the pious ones'), an order to which one was admitted only after a long period of trial. Its members were pledged to secrecy. They lived for the most part to the west of the Dead Sea, where since 1947 amazing discoveries have been made—of remains and manuscripts—which are very likely connected with this sect.

Among this last group especially, there developed what came to be known as *apocalypticism* (from a Greek word meaning: 'to make public', 'to reveal'). In the dire circumstances of the time men yearned passionately for the day when the end of the world should come. They depicted in the most lurid colours the last judgment upon sinners and the joyous destiny of the faithful of Israel. Some looked for the arrival of the promised Messiah (the Anointed One), the scion of King David's house who was to deliver Israel.

Apocalyptic writings were not infrequently presented as revelations imparted to well-known figures of the Old Testament: for instance, Enoch, Abraham, Ezra and

Baruch. Later Judaism rejected them; but they were preserved in translation by the Christian church and as time went on they exercised a considerable influence.

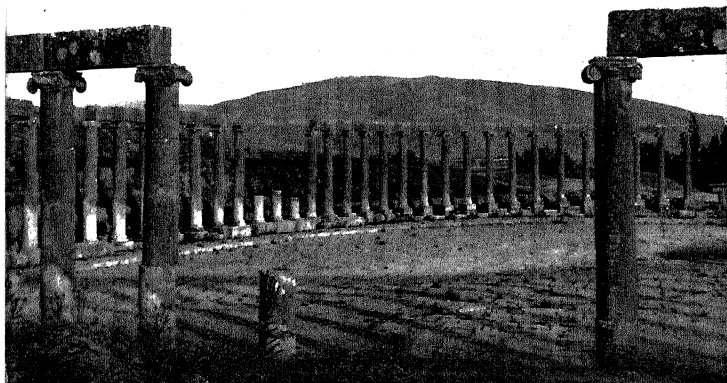
Armed resistance to the Romans was not formidable to begin with; but it grew as the century advanced (see p. 42; cf. Acts 5:36-37), more especially among the Zealots (fanatics), from whose ranks Jesus even acquired one of his disciples (Matt. 10:4). Generally speaking, however, deliverance was expected to come, not through any action on the part of men but through the intervention of God (Luke 2:38). Those who made common cause with the tyrant and placed themselves at his service—men such as the tax-gatherers ('publicans')—were bitterly hated. 'Publican' in fact was almost equivalent to 'sinner'. The same hostile judgment was meted out to the mixed population of Samaria, living in the very heart of the country and having their own centre of worship (cf. John 4:4 ff.). Viewed against this background, the significance of Luke 10:30 ff. is thrown into sharp relief.

The Jews of this period were not found only in Palestine. Wherever Paul journeyed, he came across communities of Jews, large and small, living in every place of consequence within the empire and even outside it, particularly in Mesopotamia. As a matter of fact, there were more Jews living outside of Palestine than there were in the holy land itself. In Babylonia alone there were more than a million. These expatriots are referred to as the Jews of the *diaspora* ('dispersion'). There were several reasons why the Jews had come to be so widely scattered. There was the Babylonian exile; the sale of Jewish prisoners of war as slaves; trade; the over-population of Palestine itself. But the true Jew saw this dispersion in the light of the Old Testament (Lev. 26:33; Jer. 13:24 ff.), not simply and solely as



The Roman Forum in Rome

The Roman Forum at Jerash, one of the cities of the Decapolis





A Phœnician merchant ship

a process of emigration, but rather a judgment of God; for it meant being obliged to live in heathen lands, in an environment 'without the Law'. And it meant living there as a tiny minority. The danger of apostasy was great; but those who were faithful and resolute could always hope that they would eventually be brought back to the holy land by God himself.

Wherever there were Jews there was almost bound to be a synagogue, for that constituted the link with the religion of the (fore) 'fathers'. The first business of the synagogue was study of the Law; though when it came to the regulations about 'cleanness' and intercourse with the heathen, keeping the Law naturally presented quite a problem. The Jews of the diaspora kept the sabbath as strictly as they could, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem whenever there was opportunity to do so, and paid the temple taxes regularly.

Such minority groups drew tremendous strength and support from the conviction that they belonged to the 'chosen people'. On the whole, the authorities, whether hellenist or Roman, were well disposed and afforded them protection.

The Jews were apt to affect those among whom they lived in two ways: they aroused hostility, but they also exerted a profound attraction. People resented the sheer exclusiveness of the Jew, all the customs and practices which made of the Jew a man apart from other men. Sometimes this antipathy would make itself felt in fierce outbreaks of anti-Jewish rioting (as in Alexandria in A.D. 36) but more often in an attitude of contempt. Especially in the higher reaches of society all kinds of stories were put about, hinting that the Jews were ass-worshippers and that their customs generally were quite inane. What on the other hand chiefly attracted people was the Jews'

exemplary manner of life in the moral sphere. They were much given to missionary activities (Matt. 23 : 15; Rom. 2 : 19-20); and attached to the synagogues were groups of sympathizers known as 'Godfearers' (see, for instance, Acts 13 : 43, 50). On account, perhaps, of their social position (see Acts 10 for the case of Cornelius) these people could not meet every requirement of the Law; but still they worshipped the God of Israel. There were others who came right over and identified themselves with the Jews. They became part of the Jewish people by being baptized and circumcized and by offering the sacrifices. These converts were the *proselytes* (literally, 'arrivals', 'newcomers').

One thing which helped considerably to spread the knowledge of God and to make men understand how he is to be served was the Greek version of the Old Testament. It is known as the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX, i.e. 'seventy' in Latin numerals), because tradition has it that the work of translation was completed by seventy translators in seventy days. Some authorities, however, connect the name with the number of nations referred to in Genesis 10; and in that case it would signify 'a version for all the nations'. However that may be, the consequence was that, since Greek was so well and so widely known, the Holy Scripture which for all but Jews had previously been an obscure and cryptic document could now be read almost everywhere. The translation was undertaken at the request of King Ptolemy II of Egypt (c. 260 B.C.) who wanted a copy for his library. Apparently, the Law was translated first, and then after a while the other sections. At a later period this Greek version came to mean a great deal to the Christian church, because the early Christians used it as their Old Testament. The Septuagint includes



the so-called 'apocryphal books' and is therefore longer than the Hebrew Old Testament.

Besides this translation of the Bible itself there were other writings which proclaimed the case for Judaism and denounced the foolish vanities of the heathen. Their authors tried to prove that the best ideas of the Greeks had actually been taken over from Moses; and in order to make the events recorded in the Old Testament more compelling they sometimes presented them in the form of a Greek drama. Rebukes aimed at the heathen were disguised as utterances of the pagan prophetesses, the Sibyls. In particular, some writers attempted to 'spiritualize' much of the Old Testament and so to give it a deeper meaning. For instance, the rules about 'cleanness', it was argued, do not refer to common or garden animals but to personal qualities. Again, the various characters of the Old Testament symbolize this or that human virtue; and their actions mirror this or that relationship between God and the soul. One famous author who used the allegorical method (see p. 36) was *Philo of Alexandria* (c. A.D. 30). His work has had an enormous influence, not least within the church. Then we must not forget the historian, *Flavius Josephus* (d. c. A.D. 70). He witnessed the Jewish rebellion at close quarters; and as soon as he realised how hopeless it all was, he went over to the Romans, who, as we have seen already, had a poor opinion of the Jews in many respects (see p. 49); so in his *Antiquities* and *The Jewish War* Josephus tried to give them a better idea of what his people were really like. His writings are voluminous; but because of this they are a tremendously valuable source for the history of the New Testament period.

The diaspora was an important factor in the expansion of

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Christianity; and in many ways the synagogues provided an excellent springboard for the proclamation that the promises given in the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus. It was Jewish propaganda that had made non-Jews more or less conversant with the Old Testament and had awakened in them an interest in the God of the Old Testament. All the same, we have to remember that both in Palestine and elsewhere the Jews greeted the arrival of Jesus and his apostles with the fiercest hostility.

### III. *Jesus Christ, the Central Figure of the New Testament*

#### 1. *The sources for what we know about the life of Jesus*

The whole of the New Testament revolves around one central figure—that of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the ‘Anointed One’. Its purpose is to make clear who he was and what he did. The first four books tell the story of his earthly activities; and the rest set out to show, first, how his work was carried forward in the world, and then why he is of crucial importance even to people who have not known him at all in this life.

Those first four books are known as the *gospels* (‘gospel’ = Old English ‘gōd-spel’, i.e. good news). There is a synonym, the word ‘evangel’, which is more familiar in English under the form ‘evangelist’ or ‘evangelism’. The word comes from the Greek and, because the church has used it so constantly, has made its way into most of the European languages. In English its meaning is perhaps best expressed as ‘glad message (or tidings)’. The term is also found in non-biblical Greek: for instance, it was used to describe the occasion for rejoicing conferred on the world by the birth of the Emperor Augustus (see p. 28). The Septuagint (see p. 50) associates it with the liberating act of God in putting an end to oppression and in ‘bringing mighty things to pass’. For the New Testament this is bound up at every point with the person of Jesus Christ. With him the decisive moment dawns. The glad

message is that God comes seeking mankind, lifts the barrier between himself and men, adopts them as his children. The words 'gospel' or 'evangel' therefore should not make us think in the first place of a book but rather of those glad tidings which the book conveys and helps us to understand.

Because the gospels are meant to bring us this message about Jesus, they are headed, not the Gospel *of* Matthew, *of* Mark and so forth but *according to* Matthew, that is, according to his account of the matter. The four books are distinct and separate writings. They are not linked together as a serial story in four parts might be, but each is a narrative in its own right about the glad news of Jesus and of what he has done. Thus we have a fourfold account of a single evangel.

Various attempts have been made from time to time to get the four accounts to fit together and so to form one consistent and identical story. Such a project is known as 'a harmony of the Gospels'. The first man to construct one was Tatian (c. A.D. 170). However, the church did not take it up. She wanted to conserve the four Gospels separately; and it is a good thing that she did so, for as we shall see, each has a character all its own and each illuminates particular aspects of the work of Jesus. It would be a great pity if the distinctive features of each Gospel were ever to be lost.

The Gospels describe the career of Jesus in Palestine, from his baptism to his resurrection and ascension (although in Matthew, Luke and John a certain amount of material precedes the account of the baptism). The over-all framework is the same in each case; but one has only to set the Gospels side by side to discover that whilst they all present us with the same general scheme of things, many striking differences remain. The Gospels do not always recount the

same events or give us the same sayings of Jesus. The order of events varies; and when it comes to details there are even a number of discrepancies. Still, the first three Gospels do agree to a considerable extent; and because they parallel one another so closely in this way, they are called, appropriately enough, the *synoptic* Gospels ('syn-optic' meaning 'viewing together'). John, on the other hand, has few such corresponding stories. Jesus's discourses as recorded in his Gospel are of a character that puts them in a class of their own.

In most editions of the Bible the corresponding passages (parallels) are nearly all indicated in marginal notes, so as to make it easy to compare them. You can see at once the point of this if you read, say, the account of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. Mark says no more than that Jesus was tempted; he does not say how. The other two (synoptists) do indeed tell us how, but each gives the temptations in a different order. John makes no mention whatever of the event. Again, if you read that collection of Jesus's sayings known as 'The Sermon on the Mount' (Matt. 5-7), you will notice that almost nothing of this appears in Mark or John, whilst Luke gives it, not as a single whole but in bits and pieces scattered here and there throughout his book. The story of the multiplication of the loaves (the 'feeding of the five thousand', Matt. 14: 13 ff.) is found also in the other Gospels (i.e. Mark 6: 30-44; Luke 9: 10-17; John 6: 1-13); but whereas the synoptists describe only what took place, John appends a lengthy discourse or sermon on the true 'bread of life' (John 6: 26 ff.).

John includes quite a lot of these celebrated discourses, each dealing with one central theme (for instance, the 'bread of life' in chapter 6, 'true sight' in chapter 9); and most of them take their cue from one particular incident.

Generally speaking, the synoptic Gospels present brief anecdotes or sayings, loosely strung together. The evangelists certainly do not give us complete biographies of Jesus. John says explicitly, in chapter 20:30-31, that what he has recorded is by no means the sum total of what he knew, but also that in presenting his material he had a definite aim in view: 'in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you might have life in his name.' Although the other evangelists do not say this in so many words, the whole tenor of their books shows that their purpose was in fact the same. The question that the reader must keep asking himself is: What is it that we are meant to learn from this passage about Jesus as the One sent from God? There are divergences, of course—and they are obvious enough; yet always the person being written about is recognizably one and the same.

To put these discrepancies between the Gospels in true perspective one has to bear in mind that even nowadays two people reporting on the same occurrence describe it in different ways. The evangelists did not write their books immediately after the events had taken place, but only at a much later stage (see p. 59 f. for the origins of the several Gospels). So far as the second Gospel is concerned, we have an account by Papias, who was writing at about the beginning of the 2nd century, which sheds some light on the process. Mark, he says, had not actually heard the Lord; but because he served as Peter's interpreter, he was able to write down whatever Peter said in the course of his preaching, recording it accurately but not in the order in which the events had occurred.

Peter was one of Jesus's disciples (p. 73). He came from Galilee and was a fisherman by trade. Even at a later date his dialect still gave him away (Matt. 26:73). It seems

likely that he was unable to express himself fluently in Greek and so needed Mark's assistance.

There lies then behind the Gospels this preaching activity which used these stories to bring men and women to a response of faith and to pass on to Christians the teaching of their Lord. The information came, originally at least, from eye witnesses (see Luke 1: 1-4). When those who had known Jesus personally were no longer alive, others set about the task of gathering together as carefully as they could whatever was known concerning the Lord. In the ancient world, when people heard something of importance they went to a great deal of trouble to memorize it accurately. There is a rabbinical saying to the effect that the disciple, the learner, should be like a cistern which loses no drop of water. Christians needed and wanted to learn to the best of their ability what kind of man Jesus their Lord had been.

The interrelation between the synoptic Gospels has been the subject of intensive research, more especially during the last hundred years or so. That research has enabled scholars to establish that the oldest Gospel is Mark's and that Matthew and Luke made use of it, since it appears, almost in its entirety and sometimes word for word, in their books. Remove from Matthew and Luke everything which is also in Mark, and you find that they still have a great deal of common material, mostly sayings of Jesus. One must assume therefore that there was a document of some sort containing 'Sayings of Jesus' and that they availed themselves of this. Beyond this, each evidently had access to different traditional information, material handed down but not common to both. One can say that, broadly speaking, Mark's Greek is the simplest, while Matthew and Luke both 'improve' on Mark's style in many places. Nowhere do we read that Jesus committed his

teaching to writing; and the events themselves are separated from the written record by a process of oral tradition. Very probably, a number of stories regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus were brought together at an extremely early stage, if only because Cross and Resurrection were of supreme importance when it came to proclaiming the Christian message. That can easily be deduced from the degree of attention given to these things in the Gospels, where nearly a quarter of the total record is devoted to accounts of the last week in the life of Jesus. As the information was handed down by word of mouth, it was only natural therefore that all sorts of discrepancy should occur in the reporting of particular details. Yet still—and this is a fact that one should never overlook—there was agreement on the major issues. In the accounts of Jesus's resurrection, for instance (Matt. 28 : 1 ff. and parallels), this or that element in the story may vary; but the principal fact—that of the resurrection itself—is reported by every single one of the evangelists and can be traced back to primitive tradition, as is borne out by Paul in I Cor. 15 : 3 ff., when he appeals to a great crowd of witnesses, 'most of whom are still alive' (verse 6: Paul wrote this in or about A.D. 54).

The Gospels then, as they stand in the New Testament, embrace various currents of tradition. That is why they are built up out of bits and pieces of information which often hang together very loosely indeed and are linked by means of such traditional words or phrases as 'then', 'after that' and so forth. Yet of course one can detect a certain orderliness in the arrangement of the material, as for instance where a number of incidents to do with healing are grouped together (Mark 1 : 21 ff.), or accounts of contention between Jesus and the Jews (Mark 2), or comparisons (Mark 4). This tendency to organize the material is



most marked in John, with his long discourses, each centred on one specific theme.

So far as each individual Gospel is concerned, it is worth bearing in mind these facts:

*Mark* wrote his Gospel probably in A.D. 65, but in any event before the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Mark 13); and it is based on Peter's recollections. Presumably he was in Rome at the time; for it is noticeable that he uses a number of Latin words. The author was John Mark, who came from Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 12) and had been for a time one of Paul's companions (Acts 13 : 5-13; 15 : 37). After a period of estrangement he seems later to have had a reconciliation with Paul (Col. 4 : 10). As a companion of Peter's he is mentioned in I Peter 5 : 13. It has been suggested with some reason that he might have been the young man who was present as an onlooker on the night when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14 : 51; only in this Gospel). Here the deeds of Jesus are very much to the fore. What is above all revealed in him is the power of God. People see his deeds, of course; but they fail to see who he is that performs such things. The kingdom of God has come in secret, yet with power (cf. 4 : 26 ff.; only in Mark). That Mark is writing for non-Jews is suggested by the fact that whenever some apparently odd detail occurs, he is at pains to explain its significance (7 : 3-4, for example). The glad tidings of Jesus must be proclaimed to each and every nation (13 : 10; 14 : 9).

*Matthew*, as appears from chapter 24, wrote after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. His name occurs in 9 : 9-13, where there is mention of his being called by Jesus; (but he is not so named in the other Gospels—in them he is Levi). Formerly a publican (see p. 29), he had become one of Jesus's disciples (cf. 10 : 3 and Acts 1 : 13). Nothing more of a definite nature is known about his life history.

Papias tells us (see p. 56) that it was Matthew who gathered together the 'Sayings of Jesus'. It is a striking feature of this Gospel that so many quotations from the Old Testament are introduced, usually with the formula: 'in order that it might be fulfilled.' Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus above all as the one in whom the Old Testament promises are realised. Markedly evident too is his habit of grouping the words and deeds of Jesus together in larger units such as the Sermon on the Mount (ch. 5-7), the sending out of the apostles (ch. 10) or the discourse on the Pharisees (ch. 23). A number of sayings in Matthew are addressed specifically to Israel (for instance, 10 : 5-6; 15 : 24; 23 : 3); but if the Jews prove faithless, the kingdom will be taken away from them and given to another (21 : 43). This Gospel is addressed to the Jews in particular in order to show them that Jesus is the Messiah and to make them see what that 'righteousness' is which God requires (5 : 20; 6 : 33; for 'righteousness', i.e., a right relationship with God, was what the Jews aspired to most of all). Matthew wrote probably not long after A.D. 70 in a region where a good many Jews were living (perhaps Antioch in Syria).

*Luke* knew that there had already been 'many' (witnesses) before him (1 : 1), but had checked over again for himself the accuracy of every report relating to Jesus. The thing to notice especially here is that he followed up his Gospel with a second book known as the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1 : 1). His aim in writing this two-volume work was to give a certain Theophilus, to whom it is dedicated, and thus other Romans too, a reliable account of how God's salvation had entered the world in Jesus and had spread out into that world since the moment of Jesus's departure. About the person of Theophilus nothing more is known; the epithet 'most noble' or 'most excellent' (Luke 1 : 13)

certainly suggests that he was a man of some eminence.

Luke had been one of Paul's travelling companions. He was 'of the heathen' by birth and a doctor by occupation (Col. 4 : 19). At Acts 16 : 10 there begins a section of Book II in which the writer persistently speaks in the first person plural, 'we . . .'; and there he is obviously talking about what he had himself experienced. Nowhere are we told how he first came in contact with Christianity. Luke has a great concern for history (see, e.g., 2 : 1; 3 : 1); and the implications of Christianity for the world as a whole loom large throughout his work (see e.g. 21 : 20 ff.; 24 : 47; as regards his attitude to the Samaritans, cf. p. 48). One notices too with what emphasis he depicts the love shown by Jesus towards the lost and forlorn (7 : 36 ff.; ch. 15; 19 : 1 ff.); and this Gospel stresses very much the dangers of wealth (e.g. 12 : 16-21; 16 : 10 ff.). It is remarkable too how frequently it refers to prayer, on the part of Jesus himself (3 : 21; 22 : 32, 41 ff.) quite as much as in the context of instruction given to the disciples (11 : 1 ff.; 18 : 1 ff.). One is led to assume from what is said in 19 : 43, 44 and 21 : 20 ff. that Luke wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, presumably round about A.D. 75-80.

Several times in the Gospel of *John* mention is made of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (13 : 23; 19 : 26; 20 : 2 ff.). This has usually been taken to refer to the author himself—who must be the disciple John. This man was among the earliest followers of Jesus (Mark 1 : 19) and was one of his most intimate friends (Mark 5 : 37; 9 : 2). The first Epistle of John also refers to the close contact which he had had with Jesus. Many things in this Gospel are suggestive of personal reminiscence (1 : 39 f.; 4 : 6; 13 : 21 ff., especially in chs. 18 to 21). The author is well acquainted with Jewish customs (2 : 6; 7 : 2 ff.; 18 : 28), and he offers

a translation here and there (1 : 39; 9 : 7; 19 : 17) of words deriving from the speech of Palestine (the every-day language at that time was Aramaic, although Hebrew was still used in learned circles), which suggests that he was not writing for people familiar with the language. Not very much is known about the life of John following Jesus's ascension. According to Acts he had originally been a prominent member of the Jerusalem church. Tradition has it that in the prime of life he was at work in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (see p. 30) and so must have composed his Gospel there c. A.D. 90. He says quite clearly in 20 : 31 what his aim is: to convince people that Jesus is the Christ so that they will come to share in—to partake of—the eternal life of God. Although in different words, he expresses the same thought in 3 : 16, 17: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.' The total emphasis falls on the utterly unique relationship of Jesus as the Son of God to his Father. Apart from him the world is cut off from God, lies in the grip of evil, wherein falsehood and darkness prevail. Through him men have truth and light; they are called upon to receive him in faith: 'While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light' (12 : 36). The love of God is to find its reflection in the love of men: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you' (15 : 12). But what also emerges very vividly here is the opposition which Jesus and his activities arouse (15 : 18 ff.) This finds concrete expression more especially among the Jews, who reject Jesus's claim to be the Son of God. In chapter after chapter these are the themes to which John returns again and again. In no

other part of the New Testament are the depth and height of the gospel of Christ so fully presented as here. Hence Luther could speak of it as the 'Gospel-in-chief'.

In the New Testament Epistles Jesus's earthly life, his death on the cross and his resurrection are all presupposed; but the Epistles yield almost no detailed information which is not in the Gospels. Similarly, the apocryphal Gospels—such as that ascribed to Peter—contain no reliable data which they have not extracted from the New Testament books. It is possible that in the recently discovered and investigated collection of 'Sayings of Jesus'—the so-called 'Gospel of Thomas'—a few genuine sayings were incorporated which have not been preserved in the canon; but however interesting those sayings may be in themselves, they shed no light on any side of Jesus previously unknown.

Are there any sources of information about Jesus outside the Christian tradition itself? As a matter of fact, there are quite a few. Flavius Josephus (p. 51) once or twice alludes to him as a 'righteous man'; but the authenticity of these allusions is highly questionable. The Talmud (see p. 46) refers to Jesus as a 'magician' and mentions some of the disciples by name. It is not until the 2nd century that Greek and Roman authors begin to take notice of the Christians; and that is hardly surprising, because they regarded the Christians with aristocratic disdain, as merely a Jewish sect. All the events connected with Jesus had taken place in Palestine, which was not a part of the world likely to arouse very much interest. Only when the new faith began to be something of a 'menace' were people constrained to give it their attention.

2. *The name of Jesus—the forerunner*

1. The central figure of the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Both names are used in conjunction, are sometimes so closely conjoined as to form a single appellation. Sometimes one, sometimes the other is employed, as though there were little or no difference between them. The New Testament certainly links the two names firmly together, but not so as to make 'Jesus' the forename and 'Christ' the surname. Both names have a definite meaning; but they are not synonymous, even if they do apply to one and the same person.

'Christ' (*Christos*) is a Greek word and it means 'anointed'. It renders the Hebrew '*Messiah*' or '*Messias*' (cf. John 1 : 42). That was a title applied to the expected Deliverer, because kings, priests and prophets in Israel were anointed. As in later versions this title was left untranslated, it came to be regarded more or less as a personal name. Even so, that is not correct—one really ought to say: 'Jesus, the Anointed One'.

The name 'Jesus' is another matter. We do not give this name to people in general, because it is so definitely associated with this one man and his unique character. Among the Jews of New Testament times it was not so; for them the name was a quite ordinary one. Jesus's compatriots would have called him: Jeshu bar Joseph. Yet although the name was common enough, his parents did not choose it for him, as it were, by accident. We are told emphatically in Matthew 1 : 21 and Luke 1 : 31 how the name came to be chosen—in accordance with a divine ordinance, a message from heaven. Thus there was a purpose behind it: it was meant in some sort to reflect and manifest the task which Jesus was to perform. 'Jesus' is



The Mysteries of Isis, from a wall-painting at Pompeii



Remains of a synagogue at Kefar Bir'am in the hills of Galilee



the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua'. One famous man to bear that name had been Moses' successor, Joshua the son of Nun, whom the Septuagint calls '*Jesus Nave*'. That has a definite meaning, which is: Jahweh (the Lord) delivers or saves. The New Testament recognizes this, as in Matthew 1 : 21: 'You shall call his name Jesus; for he will save his people from their sins.' That is the only place in the New Testament where such an allusion occurs; but when one sees how often the New Testament makes use of the terms 'Saviour', 'save' or 'bless', 'Redeemer', 'blessedness'—words which differ in our modern languages, but are all renderings of a single Greek root-word—then one realises that this name is indeed a vital pointer to the significance of Jesus. To Jewish readers that would have been clear enough, but hardly to the Greeks of that age or to us today.

2. The advent of Jesus was preceded by that of a *forerunner*. In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar (probably A.D. 29) there appeared in the uninhabited region bordering on the river Jordan a preacher with this urgent and stirring message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand' (Matt. 3 : 2; see also Mark 1 : 1 ff. and parallels). Because God's sovereign rule was about to begin, men were exhorted to cast aside everything that ran counter to his will and his command; for the people would first be judged according to their deeds and then the reign of God would come. 'Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' (Luke 3 : 9)—such was the warning cry that rang from the lips of the prophet John. His remarkable clothing—he wore a coat of camel's hair—and his strange manner of life attracted a great deal of attention. From all directions people crowded in to see

him. The extraordinary thing was that he addressed these admonitions of his not only to those who were commonly held to be sinners (publicans and soldiers, for example), but also to the leading members of the nation. It would not do simply to rely on the fact that one was a citizen of Jewry. It was necessary to live, in the affairs of daily life and intercourse with other men, in accordance with God's will. Thus he reproached the publicans for fleecing and exploiting the people.

This John—to distinguish him from others of the same name—has the additional title of 'the Baptist'. Those who resorted to him and heeded his preaching he baptized in the river Jordan with 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3 : 3). The cleansing by water signified that a man was made pure, that everything separating him from God had been washed away and that he was about to begin a new life.

Luke 1 is devoted to an account of the annunciation and birth of John the Baptist; and it describes what he was meant to do in these terms: 'to make ready for the Lord a people prepared' (1 : 17). When he was born, his father gave voice to a hymn of praise (1 : 68 ff.) which is usually called the Benedictus, after the initial word of the Latin version.

John also had about him a group of disciples (see Mark 2 : 18; John 1 : 35). Jesus later acknowledged his importance when he declared that there was no one greater than this prophetic figure (Luke 7 : 28). Yet John's work was a preparatory one. His baptism was with water; but he proclaimed that after him there would arise One far greater than himself, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit of God (Mark 1 : 7-8; cf. also John 1 : 19 ff.). So John directed people's attention away from himself to the Christ; and when they saw what he did, they hailed

him as Elijah, the Old Testament prophet whose return, many Jews believed, would precede the coming of the Messiah.

In his forthright preaching John did not spare even King Herod (see p. 41), because the king was leading an immoral life. The upshot was that the king had him put in gaol and eventually executed (Mark 6 : 17 ff.). During his time in prison John grew doubtful as to whether Jesus really was the promised deliverer (Luke 7 : 18 ff.); but those whom he sent to make enquiries returned with the report that Jesus was indeed doing the things predicted of the Messiah in the Old Testament.

Even in later years disciples of John the Baptist were to be found here and there (see Acts 19 : 1 ff.). In Mesopotamia there exists to this very day a religious sect, the Mandeans, in whose teachings John holds a place of considerable importance.

### 3. *The career of Jesus, I*

Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. His birth coincided with a census carried out in Palestine by command of the emperor. Mary his mother and her husband Joseph actually lived at Nazareth in Galilee; but they had complied with an edict requiring them to go back to their family's place of origin—for they were of the lineage of King David (cf. I Sam. 16 : 1 ff.). Although the birth of Jesus took place in a stall and under the most primitive conditions, the whole event was 'wrapt in heavenly splendour'. An angel proclaimed his coming: 'Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2 : 10-11). And this message was underscored by the

angelic song: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!' (Luke 2 : 14).

The story of Jesus's birth is told in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2. It was announced to Mary as a divine and miraculous event, because Jesus is the Son of God. Called by the angel 'blessed among women', Mary declared herself obedient to God's will. The canticle which she sang (Luke 1 : 46 ff.) is entitled the Magnificat, after the opening word of the Latin version.

Jesus was born, probably, in 7-6 B.C. According to Matthew 2 it must have been when Herod—who, as we know, died in 4 B.C.—was still alive. A check on the population was carried out every fourteen years (a certain amount of evidence for this has been recovered in Egypt, where samples of the forms which had to be filled in have come to light); and one such count is known to have taken place in A.D. 6. The seeming difficulty which this raises—i.e., that Jesus is born before the Christian era starts—disappears when one remembers that this method of dating was not adopted until the beginning of the 6th century A.D. and that an error was then made in the very complicated calculations which the change involved. The traditional date of Jesus's birth—the Christmas Festival on December 25-26th—finds no support in the New Testament. In fact the day was not fixed before the end of the 4th century, and only then probably in order to compete with a pagan festival of *Sol Invictus* (the Invincible Sun). In Jesus the world had obtained the true 'Sun of Righteousness' (Malachi 4 : 2). Many of the customs which have come to be associated with this feast through the passage of the centuries are of pagan origin.

King Herod was apprised of the birth of a 'king of the Jews' by 'wise men' (astrologers) from the East; and because he feared for his throne, he made an attempt on

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus's life soon after he had been born. This however was frustrated by divine intervention. Jesus's parents took him with them to safety in Egypt and did not return to Nazareth until Herod was dead.

Herod's tyranny resulted in the murder of the children of Bethlehem, the 'slaughter of the innocents'. The adoration of the Wise Men is commemorated on January 6th (the *Epiphany* or 'manifestation of the glory of the Lord', as it was called in the early church). In the East it is primarily the baptism of Jesus that is celebrated on that day (see p. 70). Another noteworthy event in the early life of Jesus is the 'presentation in the temple' (Luke. 2 : 22 ff.), with the song of Simeon—known from the first words of the Latin version as the 'Nunc Dimittis'—and its striking description of the real significance of Jesus: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.'

Jesus's father worked at the carpenter's trade in Nazareth; and so did Jesus himself (see Matt. 13 : 55 and Mark 6 : 3). No doubt he would have had the customary education of a Jew, in which a knowledge of Holy Scripture played so prominent a part (see p. 45). From his later life one can see how Jesus was accustomed to attend the synagogue (Luke 4 : 16) and how the whole background to his life was that of the Jew. Of the period of his youth up to his thirtieth year—when he was to assume his role of teacher—nothing is known in detail. All that we are told is that on reaching the age of twelve Jesus was allowed to accompany his parents to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. On that occasion they lost track of him in the crowds thronging the holy city at the time; for a festival of that sort attracted tens of thousands of visitors. His mother found him in the

temple, disputing various questions with experts in the Law and astounding them all. To Jesus this meant 'being about my Father's business' (Luke 2 : 41 ff.).

The character of the Gospels and the way they have been put together (see section 1 of this chapter) do not allow us to follow the events of Jesus's life in their exact, chronological order. We cannot even be sure about the precise length of his public ministry. In its main features, however, a picture of the course taken by his life on this earth can be built up out of the many stories which give us an impression of what he said and did.

When Jesus reached the age of 30 (Luke 3 : 23), he too went to John the Baptist (see this chapter section 2, Matt. 3 : 13 ff. and parallels) in order to be baptized. He wished to identify himself in this way with people in general. It provided occasion for him to receive the Spirit of God and so be rendered fit for his task. At that moment a voice from heaven was heard, saying: 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.' The wholly unique significance of Jesus and his special relationship to God were thus disclosed.

Immediately after the baptism came the temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4 : 1 ff. and parallels). God's adversary tried to dissuade Jesus from his implicit trust in God by flattery and fair but false promises. Jesus, however, resisted these blandishments by appealing to Holy Scripture. Having overcome this first obstacle, he began his public ministry by taking up the message preached by John (see p. 65): 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand' (cf. Mark 1 : 15). That then was the text of his proclamation throughout Galilee; and it was the theme of which his whole work proved to be the fulfilment and consummation.

He appeared in the role of teacher (i.e. rabbi—a title

given him from time to time); and he promptly called a number of people to follow him—that is to say, to accompany him as his pupils (disciples) and to receive instruction from him (see Mark 1 : 16 ff.; 2 : 13, 14). To follow Jesus meant giving up one's own home, as he himself had done. The decisive factor here was obedience to God's will, and a man who really had that at heart must be ready to sever even the bonds of kinship and family, if these stood in the way of obedience (Mark 3 : 21 ff.; Luke 9 : 57 ff.; 14 : 25 ff.). Jesus knew how exacting were the demands he made; and he urged men to weigh the consequences thoroughly before committing themselves to following him, who had nowhere to lay his head. Still, there were those who provided for his needs (Luke 8 : 1 ff.).

His activities were mainly in the district of Galilee, of which Capernaum was the centre. The words of Jesus, given added point by his miracles and especially by his acts of healing, made a profound impression. Men and women flocked in from every quarter, whenever there was rumour of his arrival. The reaction which his behaviour evoked is reflected in the words: 'He taught as one who had authority and not as the scribes' (see, e.g., Mark 1 : 22). It frequently happened that people were surprised or disconcerted by him. He would appear now in a synagogue, now in an ordinary house or somewhere out in the open. He would often give his disciples, in private, a more detailed explanation of what he had been saying (e.g., Mark 4 : 10, 34). Again and again in the Gospels we read that 'great multitudes' of people came to hear him. Sometimes they would go along with him and remain for a time in his entourage (Mark 6 : 31). One can say therefore that he had a measure of success. But he did not everywhere meet with an equally kind reception. He had an unpleasant time, for example, in his native Nazareth (Mark 6 : 1 ff. and

parallels). There as elsewhere men were astonished at his teaching, the gist of which was, as Luke tells us, that the prophecy of Isaiah 61 : 1 ff. was meant to apply to him (Luke 4 : 16 ff.). They were thoroughly suspicious of this man whom they had known since childhood. Jesus was faced there with an intensity of unbelief that put a considerable brake on his activities. There was even some question of an attempt on his life; for it appeared, as he said himself, that a prophet is nowhere without honour, unless it be in the city of his fathers and among his kinsfolk and in his own house.

How little his family approved of his behaviour is shown by the fact that even his brothers did not believe in him (John 7 : 1 ff.). On one occasion they wanted to carry him off home; 'for they said: he is not in his right mind' (Mark 3 : 21). People were unwilling to acknowledge the wonderful power which flowed from him.

Whilst on the one hand therefore Jesus's activity found a response among the people, on the other there was growing opposition. Reaction was hostile notably among the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, because on various occasions Jesus healed on the sabbath or consented to something or other which the Law did not permit of on that day (Mark 2 : 23-3 : 6), or because he kept company with men and women who from the orthodox Jewish standpoint were dyed-in-the-wool sinners (Mark 2 : 16). So strong was their hostility that they were soon busy with plans for getting rid of him.

Jesus's conduct was such that in many respects it was bound to attract a good deal of attention. He would consort with people—with the publicans, for example—who were shunned by the pious Jew; and he would frequent their homes just as he would a Pharisee's (cf. Luke 19 : 1 ff.). He was not an ascetic like John the



Baptist. They even said of him: 'Behold, a glutton and a drunk and a friend of tax-collectors and sinners' (Matt. 11 : 19). One is struck by the fact that the first miracle or 'sign' that Jesus performed happened at a wedding party (John 2 : 1 ff.). When he wants to depict the happiness that is to be, in the kingdom of God, he uses the image of a wedding feast for that purpose too. Jesus saw this world as God's creation; but for that very reason he was always seeking in it for that which was lost (Matt. 9 : 11 ff. and parallels).

From his circle of followers Jesus chose twelve men to be in a special sense his disciples. Perhaps the most celebrated of them are Peter, John, James, Thomas and Judas (Mark 3 : 13 ff. and parallels). Generally speaking, these were people of simple origins who had had no particular training, so far as instruction in the Jewish faith is concerned. No doubt that is why their bearing and behaviour caused so much astonishment later on, because they were 'uneducated, common men' (Acts 4 : 13). The choice of the number 12 was not accidental; for it was in point of fact the number of the tribes of the people of Israel—and this group of men, the twelve disciples, were to form the basis of a 'new people of God'. At a given moment—although precisely when it was is not specified—Jesus sent them out two by two as envoys charged with the task of carrying his message still deeper into Jewish territory. It was for this reason too that they came to be known later as the apostles (i.e., the men sent forth; cf. Mark 6 : 7 ff. and parallels). At first they were told to confine their attention to the Jews; but afterwards, when Jesus had departed, their charge was extended to include the entire world (see p. 92). They were to emulate the zeal and devotion with which their Lord had carried out the work he came to do.

Luke (10 : 1 ff.) refers also to the commissioning of 70 or of 72. This figure alludes to the multiplicity of nations on the earth, which according to the Jewish idea of things were 70 in number.

Their words were to inform men of the Master's message and his mission (Luke 10 : 16); for he sent them as the Father had sent him (John 20 : 21). It was a point of law among the Jews that a man should adhere strictly to the substance of any business or message with which he had been entrusted. On more than one occasion Jesus pointed out that they would share the lot of their Master, for the disciple is not above his master (Matt. 10 : 24): 'If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also' (John 15 : 20).

The disciples were in high spirits when after some time they made their way back to Jesus. They had spread the message far and wide; and they had also seen how the effect of their preaching was to break down the resistance of forces opposed to God (Luke 10 : 17, 18). They had seen the demons or evil spirits submit, just as they had done in face of various miracles performed by Jesus himself (see e.g., Mark 5 : 1 ff. and parallels).

When Jesus and his disciples afterwards went off to get some rest and to be alone, the crowd followed him. Mark (6 : 34) describes his reaction in a memorable sentence: 'He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.' Jesus began to teach them once more; and by the time he had finished it had grown late—too late to get back in time for a meal. Using only a few loaves and fishes, and despite the size of the crowd, Jesus was able to provide them with food. John tells us (6 : 14, 15) that as a result of this miraculous feeding and of the tremendous impression it made on the people present,

they began to look upon Jesus as a second Moses and wanted to acclaim him their king. But Jesus refused to let them do that. He withdrew, preferring to take the way which God had planned for him.

The image of the shepherd and the sheep, to express the relationship of leader and people, is one that presented itself quite naturally in a country like Palestine. It occurs frequently in the Bible and elsewhere. One need only think of Psalm 23; John 10 : 1 ff.; and Luke 15 : 4-6.

Jesus restricted his ministry to the Jewish people and did not himself go beyond the national frontiers. The nation which had been called to be the light of the world must first be led back to a true knowledge of God and must learn obedience to its King. Only once do we hear of Jesus going a little way over the border—and even then he wanted to remain unrecognized. However, it was not to be; for a heathen woman came to ask his help for her little girl. At first he declined to do anything; but the mother gave him such a pithy answer—and one which spoke so eloquently of her faith—that in the end Jesus did as she desired (Mark 7 : 24-30).

The reason why Jesus denied her request to begin with is that in the pagan world of those days there were many miracle-workers; and he was anxious that this heathen woman should not regard him as simply one of them. When the woman had evidently understood what Jesus was getting at, he agreed to act.

So Jesus's mission on earth gradually took shape. It turned out to be rather like the work of the sower, which he himself describes so vividly in one of his parables (Mark 4 : 1 ff. and parallels). In the ancient East the land was not as fertile as is ours in Europe today. Thus the seed is scattered; but it falls on varying types of soil. Some of the seed is lost because it is picked up by the birds,

because it is choked or simply because the soil is poor; only a part comes to fruition. The message of Jesus too finds only a limited hearing; on many it is totally lost or has a merely temporary effect. A lot of people would come to see him and listen to him, but they would not commit themselves. That is sharply illustrated by a distressing incident related by John (6 : 66 ff.). After a sermon in which Jesus had been speaking of the necessity for complete union with him as the only way to God, his listeners said how difficult that was. 'After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him'; whereupon Jesus put the question to the Twelve, whether they also did not wish to go away.

The gospel was there—always present, always operative; but this was not something which bore the marks of visible success—just as one cannot actually see a grain of wheat growing. Nevertheless, it was being effected in secret (Mark 4 : 26 ff.). For Jesus himself this notion of the grain came to have a yet more profound, more personal implication: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12 : 24).

#### 4. *The career of Jesus, II*

One day when Jesus and his disciples were on their way to the northern town of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked them what ideas people in general entertained about him (Mark 8 : 27 ff. and parallels). The replies varied; but they all represented Jesus to be this or that major prophet. Then Jesus wanted his disciples to give their personal opinion. It was Peter who, speaking on their behalf, said: 'You are the Messiah (Christ),' that is, the promised deliverer of the people, the One who is to make an end of all evil and

bring in the splendour and glory of God's kingdom. Once the secret was out, Jesus forbade them to say anything more about it at all, in public. For his disciples he associated it with an extraordinary idea: namely, that the 'Son of Man' (i.e., he who according to the tenor of Daniel 7 : 13 was to bring in the rule of God) must first suffer and be put to death by the leaders of the Jewish people, so that after his resurrection he might enter into his glory (cf. Luke 24 : 26). This, the first of three intimations of suffering (Mark 9 : 31; 10 : 33, 34), moved Peter to protest; for such a view of the Messiah's role was quite out of line with prevailing ideas on the subject. According to the popular notion the Messiah would be an earthly ruler who would overthrow and destroy his enemies by force. Jesus sharply refuted that when he said to Peter: 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.'

Six days later came the 'transfiguration on the mountain' (Mark 9 : 2 ff. and parallels). In the presence of certain disciples Jesus's countenance was changed: his earthly body was irradiated by a heavenly light. All at once he was seen speaking with Moses and Elijah, the two men who represented 'the Law and the prophets' of the Old Testament. Peter wanted to bind this vision firmly down to earth—but that could not be. Nevertheless, the disciples became aware of a voice from heaven which testified: 'This is my beloved Son; hear him.' Thus as Jesus set out upon his path of suffering and woe it was made clear from the start that it was God's will for him to tread that way; and in so doing he was still the Son. For the time being the disciples were to reveal nothing of this—they were to do so only after his resurrection.

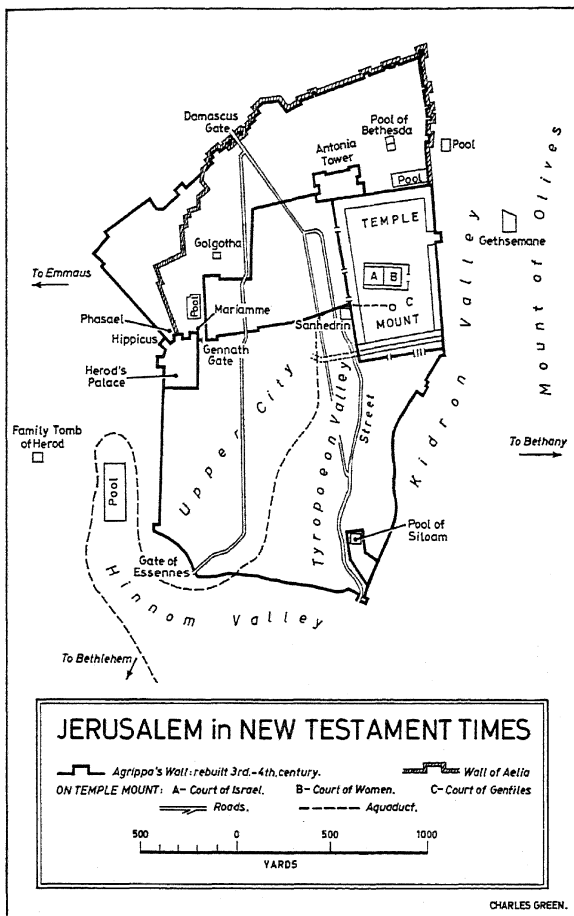
Where this event took place we do not know. There is no foundation at all for the traditional suggestion that it

was Mount Tabor. According to the Old Testament both Moses and Elijah had departed this life in an abnormal way (cf. Deut. 34; II Kings 2). Among the various speculations of the Jews regarding the end of the world was one which had to do with the return of these two men. Thus Mark 9 : 11 ff. refers to the return of Elijah, which Jesus regarded as being fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist.

With the approach of the Passover Feast Jesus and his disciples made the prescribed journey to the holy city, Jerusalem (Exod. 23 : 14). They went there to celebrate the great festival of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 12), in company with many thousands of other pilgrims. Despite the restrictions of Roman occupation, the Passover was a time for rejoicing, because it kept alive the hope of a fresh liberation.

Jesus used the occasion to turn his arrival into something of a demonstration. When he reached the vicinity of the Mount of Olives, he instructed some of the disciples to fetch him an ass. Mounted upon it, he completed the last stage of his journey, which took on the complexion of a royal entry. With palm-branches—the tokens of victory—in their hands the people acclaimed him and sang their psalms of jubilation: 'Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord (Ps. 118 : 26); blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that is coming; Hosanna in the highest!' (Mark 11 : 1 ff.).

John 12 : 12 ff. says further that only afterwards did the disciples come to understand what was happening then: that this was in fact a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Zechariah (9 : 9): 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass.' 'Hosanna!' is an exclamation which signifies: 'Pray, deliver!' In acclaiming the 'kingdom of



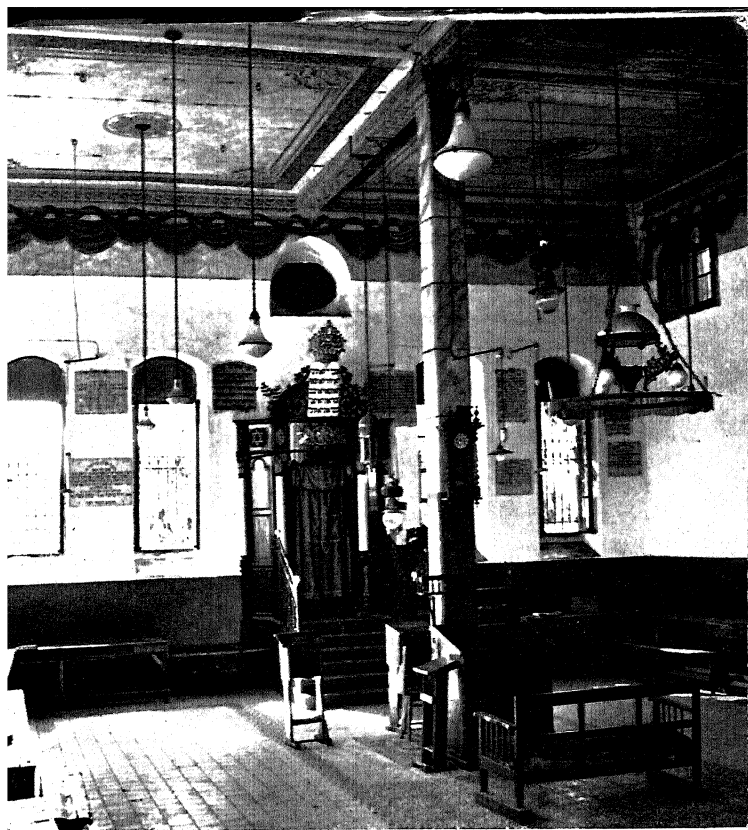
David that is coming' the people were clearly expecting the dominion of the glorious king of Israel to be in some way re-established. With this event in mind, we still speak of the Sunday before Easter as Palm Sunday.

When Jesus, gazing down from the Mount of Olives, saw Jerusalem lying there in all her radiant beauty, crowned with the temple, he wept over the city (Luke 19: 14 ff.). He saw in imagination how her splendour would be ravaged because her people refused to acknowledge what was necessary to her peace (a play here on the name 'Jerusalem', the latter part of which is associated with the Hebrew word for peace).

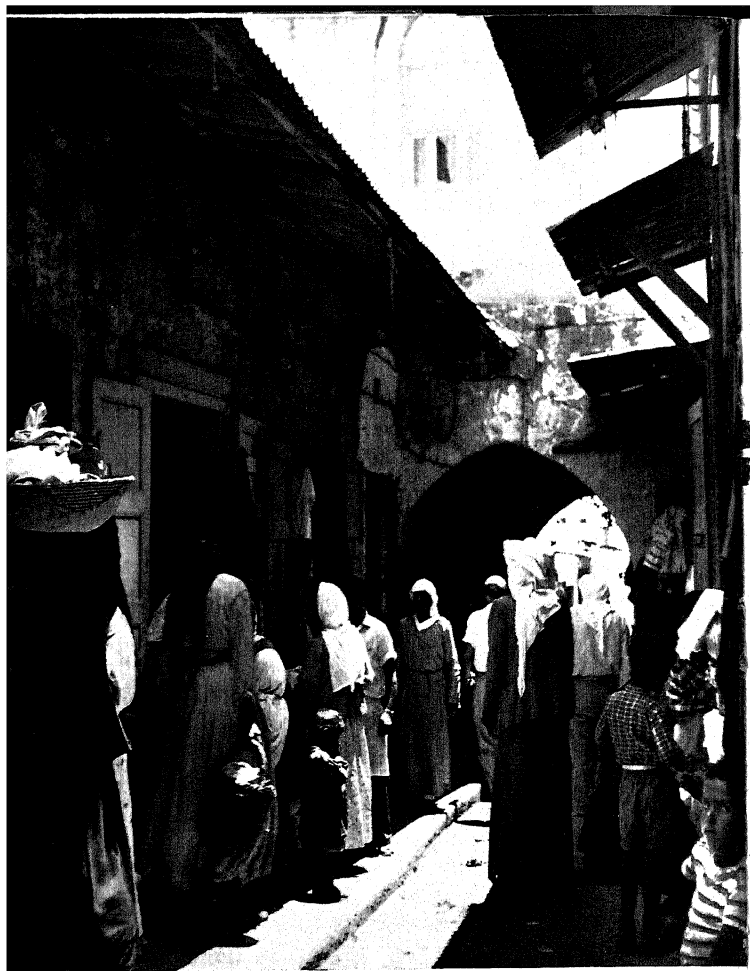
That glorious entry was a thorn in the flesh of the Jewish leaders. They would not recognize Jesus as the messianic king and, what is more, were afraid that the affair might throw up a popular movement which could have evil consequences (cf. the comment afterwards recorded in John 11: 48). But when they required Jesus to put an end to this outburst of enthusiasm, he did not comply. In the days that followed certain events occurred which increased still further the tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. In the first place, Jesus made a clean sweep of the temple courtyard, throwing out the men who were using it to trade in. For the convenience of those who wished to offer a sacrifice, the animals were displayed there for sale; and for those who needed to exchange their foreign currency for the didrachmas required for the temple taxes there were the bankers, seated at their tables. In this way the service of God was being exploited for the enrichment of men. Instead of being a house of prayer, said Jesus—alluding to Isaiah 56: 7 and Jeremiah 7: 11—the temple had become a den of thieves (Mark 11: 11-17 and parallels).

In a parable about some leaseholders of a vineyard who





Interior of a synagogue in Jerusalem



A street scene in Nazareth

refused to pay their rent and even did to death the owner's son, Jesus represented to his hearers—who were familiar with the idea of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord (Isa. 5 : 1 ff.)—the conduct of the Jewish leaders and the destiny in store for himself. Those leaders understood very well whom he had in mind, but still desisted—if only because they feared the people—from putting him out of the way (Mark 12 : 1 ff. and parallels). A political trick question about paying tribute to the Romans was parried by Jesus: if one uses the imperial coinage, one must also pay tribute—but 'render to God that which is God's' (Mark 12 : 13-17). When the Sadducees (p. 46) concocted an extravagant story to make the resurrection from the dead look ridiculous, Jesus disputed with them and showed that the things of God and of his kingdom are not to be conceived of in terms of circumstances in this world (Mark 12 : 18-27). On another occasion he dealt with the question of how the Scribes could say that the Messiah was a descendent of David and therefore an earthly prince, whilst in Psalm 110 : 1 David calls him 'Lord'—and thus One of higher standing, One who is on a level with God. Without saying it in so many words, Jesus thereby intimated who he really is (Mark 12 : 35-37).

When the disciples remarked upon the beauty of the temple, Jesus responded with a fairly lengthy discourse in which he described the coming destruction of Jerusalem. This discourse developed into a compelling picture of the hardship which his disciples would have to undergo and of the trials that would come upon them and tempt them to fall away. But before the end should come, the gospel had first to be preached throughout the world. The homily, interwoven with various strands of Jewish apocalyptic (see p. 47), is an urgent call to men to be watchful and on their guard as soon as they detect the first warning signs

that these things are on the way. 'But he who endures to the end will be saved' (Mark 13 : 13).

A comparison of Mark 13, Matt. 24 and Luke 21 is interesting, because the reference to the destruction of Jerusalem is more explicit in the one instance than in the others. But that event is, as it were, projected against the gigantic screen of the whole of world history. What happens on a minor scale to Jerusalem will then happen on the grand scale. These words constitute a powerful challenge to the disciples and might give the impression that Jesus considered the end of the world to be imminent. Mark 13 : 32 is therefore highly significant in this connection: 'But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'; cf. Acts 1 : 7: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.' In these terms Jesus dismissed root and branch all those calculations regarding the end of the world with which people have busied themselves down the centuries and in which they even discover the very core of the Christian revelation itself. The precise moment of the end was hidden from Jesus himself; but that is immaterial, so far as the summons to watchfulness is concerned. That holds good at all times.

A few days before the actual day of the Passover Feast some priests and Scribes, led by the high priest Caiaphas, conspired together to get rid of Jesus. His growing popularity alarmed them. They feared an insurrection which would give the Romans an excuse to intervene; and they had no wish to accept this Jesus as Messiah. Yet they did not want to kill him during the actual period of the Feast, when there were so many people present in the city. They were still at a loss as to how they could get him into their hands; but the means were provided by one of

Jesus's disciples, Judas, who volunteered to betray him.

On the evidence of the New Testament there can be no doubt that the Jewish leaders were set on bringing about the death of Jesus. Although attempts have been made from the Jewish side to represent this as a tendentious interpretation on the part of the evangelists, it is the only feasible explanation of the facts. But of course that is not to be laid at the door of the Jewish race in its entirety or in subsequent periods of history, as Christians certainly did during the centuries that followed—a circumstance which has resulted in the most frightful persecutions of Jewish people. All that runs completely counter to the example of the Master himself, who prayed on the cross for his murderers: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23 : 34). As for the motives which led Judas to commit his act of treachery, there has been a great deal of speculation, none of which has yielded a complete and final answer to this enigma. John 12 : 4 ff. points in the direction of avarice, without however directly linking it, as a motive, to the betrayal. It should be observed that the sequence of events in the synoptics (see p. 55). and in John is not in every particular the same, even though it is the same facts that they are presenting.

Like all Jews, Jesus and his disciples kept the Passover Feast in the traditional manner, with a meal. The essential item at this ceremonial meal was the 'Paschal lamb', which had been slaughtered in the temple. There would also be on the table a dish of bitter seasoning—a kind of sauce—and a platter laden with what are known as *mazzôth*, cakes of unleavened bread (cf. Mark 14 : 12). All of this was a visible reminder of the story of the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12). In the course of the meal four beakers of wine were passed round. The custom was for one of the children present to ask why these unusual victuals were provided;

and that was a cue for the head of the household to tell the story—old, yet ever new—of the deliverance. The meal concluded with the singing of a number of psalms. That is how Jesus too must have kept the Feast; but conscious of the coming crisis, he conducted this sacred meal in a manner which made of it a unique occasion. To start with, he set an example to his disciples by performing a menial task, which was to wash the feet of the reclining guests: 'If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet' (John 13 : 1 ff.). As the meal proceeded, Jesus foretold that one of the disciples would betray him and another disown him, whilst all would leave him in the lurch. But what turned that particular Passover meal into something quite exceptional was that Jesus set it within the illuminating context of his approaching death. Having uttered a blessing, he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying: 'Take, this is my Body.' Later on, when it came to the cup of blessing, he said: 'This is the blood of my covenant, which is shed for many.' Some sources add to this the words: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' That is how Jesus instituted the 'Lord's Supper' which, as Paul declares (in I Cor. 11 : 26), proclaims the Lord's death until he comes. It is an abiding memorial of how by his death, which is 'a ransom for many' (Mark 10 : 45), Jesus has made a new covenant with God for men.

Our sources of information about this 'last supper' are Mark 14 : 12 ff. and parallels and I Corinthians 11 : 23 ff. John, it is true, mentions the meal; but he says nothing about the institution, probably because according to him Jesus is himself the true Paschal Lamb, who at the very time when the lambs are slaughtered suffered on Golgotha (John 19). It would appear from John 18 : 28 that the Paschal meal had still to be celebrated. The 'memorial of

the death of Jesus' is not an invitation merely to think of his dying or to keep in remembrance the day of his death. The New Testament proclaims (see p. 91) that Jesus is risen from the dead and that he is the living Lord. The New Testament always sees the death of Jesus as bound up with his resurrection; it is not a terminus but the beginning of the new life with God. John (13-17) gives a very detailed account of Jesus's conversation with his disciples during that last meal, where, under the image of the vine and its tendrils or branches, he speaks of the continuing and abiding union they have with him: of the suffering which awaits his disciples in the world, but also of the tremendous courage and confidence which may be theirs because Jesus has conquered. He speaks of the separation, of the parting there must be between them and himself, but also of the Holy Spirit who will be with them to comfort them always. These profound and memorable sayings end with the 'High-priestly Prayer' (John 17) in which Jesus prays for the disciples and the world: 'I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

When Jesus had concluded the meal with the doxology, he went with his disciples to a garden outside Jerusalem, called Gethsemane (i.e. olive press). There he prayed in solitude, whilst his disciples fell asleep from exhaustion. Jesus yearned to do the will of his Father, as he had come to know it, in all things (Matt. 6 : 10: 'Thy will be done'). He was aware of a divine plan for his death (in the predictions of the Passion (p. 77) the word 'must' occurs again and again). But here he is wrestling with his revulsion in the face of death: 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.' So even he who is the Son of the Father

had to learn to do God's will and to walk in his way. Meanwhile, instead of watching and praying, the disciples slept (Matt. 14 : 32 ff. and parallels).

Having prayed three times, Jesus knew himself to be ready. At that moment the disciple Judas came along with some of the officers of the Jewish Council to take him prisoner. The signal that was to give him away was a kiss offered in greeting (the 'kiss of Judas'). After a brief attempt at resistance on the part of one of the disciples—which Jesus deprecated—they all fled. And Jesus was brought before the Council of the Jews as a criminal (Mark 14 : 43 ff. and parallels).

During the night the Sanhedrin was convened. In order to get sentence of death pronounced they tried to indict and condemn Jesus from his own mouth; but the testimony of witnesses as to what he had said failed to meet the requirements of the Law (Deut. 19 : 15). Jesus listened to it all in silence. Then the president, Caiaphas the high priest, came out with the real question at issue, which had never been put so openly before: 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' (a circumlocution for 'God'). Jesus's reply is a clear declaration of assent: 'I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power (i.e. of God), and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14 : 62; in him Dan. 7 : 13-14 finds its fulfilment). That was blasphemy; for the Jews believe that to assert that God has a Son is the ultimate impiety, is something heathenish and altogether terrible. At that, Jesus is sentenced to death (cf. Lev. 24 : 16, death by stoning).

Yet the Jewish Council, although possessing some authority to act in strictly Jewish affairs, had no power to execute sentence of death. They had to turn therefore to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, a man who was not at all highly esteemed by the Jews in general, but who



could not be ignored in this case. However, before they could even get as far as that, Jesus had still more to endure. He was exposed to ridicule and forced to 'play at prophesying' in the role of Christ. Then came Peter's denial. Peter had returned to watch Jesus being tried. But though he had earlier vowed that he would be loyal and true (Luke 22 : 33) and had received a warning from Jesus, he now protested three times that he did not know him (Mark 14 : 66 ff. and parallels).

When Peter had denied Jesus, the crowing of a cock reminded him of what Jesus had foretold. 'And the Lord turned and looked at Peter . . . And he went out, and wept bitterly' (Luke 22 : 61, 62). Eventually, he resumed his place among the disciples and was one of the first to see the risen Lord (p. 91). In John 21 : 15 ff. we read how Jesus welcomed Peter back with the thrice repeated question: 'Do you love me?' When you consider what a major position Peter came to occupy among the first Christians, it is astonishing to see how it was precisely such stories as that of Peter's denial (cf. also p. 77) which were preserved. No one made out that the apostles were wellnigh perfect saints; but when they saw the love of Christ breaking through even in such a person as Peter, people drew comfort and courage from the spectacle. With Judas it was another story. Certainly he was filled with remorse and gave his reward back to the priests. But he did not find the way back himself. 'He went and hanged himself' (Matt. 27 : 3 ff.).

On what grounds would Jesus have to be indicted before the Roman governor? It could not be for blasphemy—the crime for which the Sanhedrin had condemned him—for from the Romans' viewpoint it stood to reason that a god could have children. But a political charge could be

brought against Jesus on account of the messianic status that he claimed: 'We found this man . . . forbidding us to give tribute to Cæsar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king' (Luke 23 : 2). That spelled rebellion against the authority of Rome—something which the governor was of course bound to suppress by every possible means. At the same time, here was an opportunity for the Sanhedrin to demonstrate its loyalty to the Romans. When Pilate interrogated him on this point, Jesus declared that his kingship was not of this world—for then his followers would certainly have fought on his behalf. After repeated questioning, in which even King Herod was involved, (p. 41), Pilate could find no reason or justification whatever for a sentence of death. During these proceedings the Roman soldiery paid facetious homage to Jesus as a mock king with purple mantle, reed for a staff and crown of thorns. There was a legal custom that at the Feast of the Passover a Jewish prisoner should be released; and Pilate wanted to rescue Jesus by making use of this. But the Jews chose in favour of a certain Barabbas, one of the Zealots (p. 48); for as they saw it in nationalistic terms, the release of Barabbas was another blow struck in the cause of liberty. They insisted that Jesus be crucified; and they threatened to lay a complaint against Pilate with Rome, alleging that he had shown favour towards a revolutionary figure. Granted the suspicious nature of the Emperor Tiberius, such a charge was likely to have dire consequences. 'So Pilate gave sentence that their demands should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will' (Luke 23 : 24-25; cf. Mark 15 : 1-21 and parallels).

The crucifixion to which Jesus was thus condemned was an extremely savage form of penalty which the Romans

had taken over from the Persians and which they inflicted upon slaves and insurrectionists. (A Roman citizen could never be made to undergo crucifixion.) A stake was fixed upright in the ground. The condemned person was then suspended upon it by means of a crossbeam; and hanging thus under the scorching sun, he died a terrible death from exhaustion and in the throes of intolerable pain. Two other men—Zealots, probably (see p. 48)—were put to death along with Jesus. Above his cross was set an inscription which both specified his crime (cf. Luke 23 : 38) and attested his claim.

It was no extraordinary punishment to which Jesus was condemned. Josephus relates that at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, for instance, a great number of Jews were executed in this way. The Jews themselves did not practise crucifixion; but they had a custom that anyone put to death was left hanging for one day only (Deut. 21 : 22-23). In Galatians 3 : 13 Paul connects this with the death of Jesus: 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree.' A quarrel arose between the Jews and Pilate over the inscription, because, naturally enough, the Jews would not acknowledge that Jesus was 'the king of the Jews'. John says that the inscription was in three tongues: Hebrew—the language of the country; Greek—the *lingua franca*; and Latin—the language of the occupying power. In some later depictions one sees over the cross the letters INRI; that is, in Latin: *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudæorum* (Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews).

The crucifixion took place on a hill called Golgotha (Skull) which lay outside Jerusalem. Each of the evangelists records different words of Jesus, uttered by him on the cross. These are often brought together as 'the Seven Words from the Cross':

1. Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

2. I thirst.
3. Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise (to one of the murderers).
4. *Eloī, Eloī, lama sabachtani* (Aramaic: see p. 62): My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Ps. 22 : 2).
5. Woman, behold your son! Son, behold your mother! (to Mary and the disciple John).
6. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit (Ps. 31 : 6).
7. It is finished.

The sufferings of Jesus, watched closely by a large number of inquisitive onlookers, were made worse by the rough behaviour of the soldiers, who dived for his clothing, and by the taunts of the priests and of the men crucified with him. They called out that Jesus should simply prove that he was the saviour by freeing himself and the others; then they would believe. Only one Roman captain perceived that Jesus was innocent (or according to another account, that he was the Son of God). Jesus's friends and relatives could only look on at all this from a distance. From 12 until 3 o'clock in the afternoon there was an eclipse of the sun. Shortly after that, Jesus died.

A Jewish councillor, Joseph of Arimathea, who had not voted in favour of condemning Jesus, asked for his body and caused it to be laid to rest for the time being, in a tomb within his own garden. The sabbath was approaching; and shortage of time made it impossible for all the measures necessary for a proper interment to be carried out. The job would have to be done on the day after the sabbath; but meanwhile only the preliminaries could be attended to.

That then was the end of the Nazarene rabbi, who had taught and gone about 'doing good' (Acts 10 : 38) and who, as the Christ, the Son of God, had died the death of a

slave. As for the disciples, after they had fled from Gethsemane they had once more sought one another out. For them this was a catastrophic blow. As one of them put it: 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' (Luke 24 : 21); but that expectation had been sadly betrayed (cf. Mark 15 : 22 ff. and parallels).

In the early morning after that sabbath day a few women made their way to the tomb of Jesus, to see to it that he had proper burial (Mark 16 : 1 ff. and parallels). To their astonishment, however, they found the tomb empty. By the words of a heavenly messenger they were given to understand that Jesus was risen from the tomb. This incredible piece of information they in their turn brought to the disciples; but the latter put no store by it at all, dismissing it as so much idle talk. It was not so much the empty tomb which corroborated the women's story as the fact that Jesus himself marvellously appeared to them, in living, bodily form.

The most primitive account of the appearance of the risen Lord is provided by Paul in I Corinthians 15 : 3 ff. He had got his information from the original (Christian) community; and he stresses the point that in or about A.D. 54, when he was writing, there were people still alive who had personally had experience of the events. He mentions as among those who had seen Jesus: Peter; the twelve apostles; 'five hundred brethren at one time'; James, the brother of Jesus, who had not at first believed in him, but since his appearing in this way had taken on an important position in the church; all the apostles; and finally Paul himself. The Gospels record only some of the relevant stories, one of which describes how Jesus appeared to two people walking along the road towards the small village of Emmaus. At first they did not recognize

him. Instead, they told him about all their troubles; but he showed them how the Christ must suffer and so enter into his glory (Luke 24 : 13 ff.). To the disciples who had assembled behind locked doors for fear of the Jews Jesus appeared on the evening of the day of his resurrection and again one week later, in order to convince 'doubting' Thomas (John 20 : 19 ff.). Some of these appearances occurred in Galilee (Matt. 28 : 7, 16 ff.; John 21). According to Acts 1 : 3 ff., the renewed intercourse with the disciples, which was of a different order from what had gone before, lasted for forty days, during which time Jesus talked with them about the things of God and his kingdom. We are not told anything in detail about this—only that Jesus gave the command to carry the gospel out into the world and to baptize new disciples 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 28 : 18 ff.). At the end of this forty-day period Jesus finally departed out of this world. The ascension (Acts 1 : 3 ff.) happened on the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem. Jesus was then removed from the view of his disciples, leaving with them, however, the promise that he would return. His departure did not mean that his work was at an end. On the contrary, it was carried forward by the labours of those who had been his pupils and were now to receive, for that very purpose, a special power from on high.

The ascension is not simply a mode of departure; for it means that Jesus now 'takes his throne', he takes his place with God, is 'seated at the right hand of God' (cf. also Philip. 2 : 9 ff.). This is the crown and climax of the path which led him through suffering and death. The cross of Jesus is set in the light of that 'glorification', the outcome of his rising again and his ascending into heaven. For Christians therefore the cross is not the token of a curse

or of contumely but of Christ's faithfulness and God's forgiving love (Philip. 2 : 9; John 15 : 13). That is why we speak of the day of the crucifixion as 'Good' Friday. Passover (Easter) for the Christian church is no longer now a commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt (p. 43) but the Festival of the Resurrection of Jesus; and Sunday, or the Lord's Day, is a weekly memorial of it: 'so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life' (Rom. 6 : 4).

No one was present in person to experience the event of the resurrection itself. The disciples saw only the result. It goes beyond the limits of what we human beings are able to comprehend. Men down the ages have often denied that it is a fact, or else they have ascribed it to the inventive imagination or wishful thinking of the disciples in their dejection and dismay. But the complete change which came over this whole group of men and women is evidence of the reality of the resurrection. 'We have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'; such is the witness of Peter in later days (I Pet. 1 : 3) and such the joyous hope which runs through the whole of the New Testament—a hope that is a surety, taking away the terrors of death itself. We must not forget, however, that as the New Testament record makes clear, the resurrection of Jesus means, not that he comes back into *our* world but that he goes forth into God's.

5. *Jesus's proclamation by word and deed, I*

In the preceding sections we have been dealing with the course of Jesus's life; and as it turned out, the emphasis fell entirely on the final stage, as it does in the New Testament itself. We have glimpsed here and there, *en passant*, something of what Jesus did and intended by his deeds. But that is hardly enough. We shall need to look more closely at what he did and taught during his life on earth, if we are to get a clear picture of what he wished to impart to mankind. The Gospel records help to fix all this in the memory and to ensure that its influence and effect continue. It is thus that we come to know him who 'is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb. 13 : 8). For though Jesus has indeed left this world, he has not forsaken it. Whatever else may change, his work goes on. Who then is this Jesus, whom we do not see and in whom we may yet believe (I Pet. 1 : 8)? It is from the Gospels that we learn to know him.

Jesus did not provide any systematic exposition of his teaching or leave a neatly reasoned philosophy behind him. His 'doctrine' finds expression in brief utterances, or sometimes in longer discourses, or in his actions. His sayings are often cast in poetic form. Thus he makes use of parallelism, as for instance in Matthew 7 : 7: 'Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.' It is really a single idea that is being expressed; but because it is repeated in different terms, it acquires a more cutting edge.

You can find plenty of examples for yourself by reading through the Gospels. In several of the modern translations (see p. 24) the poetic character of much of Jesus's teaching



is easy to recognize, because such passages are printed in an appropriate format.

A striking feature of Jesus's teaching is that, like the rabbis, he makes regular use of *parables*. Sometimes they took the form of brief pictorial images or metaphors: for instance, the 'broad and narrow ways' of Matthew 7 : 13-14; the 'new patch' and 'new wine' of Matthew 9 : 16-17; and at Matthew 11 : 16-17 the children at play. But often the parables were quite elaborate narratives by means of which Jesus showed, in the form of a dramatic story, what God meant for human beings and what he required of them. To get at the meaning of this kind of parable one has always to enquire what is the crucial point—or what are the crucial points—at issue in the comparison. In a picture of this sort, taken from the life of every day, not all the details are of equal weight and relevance. That is why it is important to pay attention to the particular circumstances which occasioned the parable and prompted Jesus to tell it.

Reference has been made already (on pp. 75 and 80 f.) to certain parables; but besides those there are a few more which, because they are particularly well known, ought to have separate mention here:

*a.* The 'good Samaritan': a man, set upon by bandits, is aided, not by the official representatives of the Jewish religion but by a Samaritan—one whom the Jews scorned and despised. The point Jesus wanted to make here is that the 'neighbour' of Leviticus 19 : 18 is not just any *compatriot* but any and every human being, regardless of nationality or race (Luke 10 : 25 ff.; see also v. 36).

*b.* The 'rich fool': concerning a farmer who had had much good fortune and was reckoning on a carefree future, but had not reckoned at all with God, who holds all life in his hand. The lesson which Jesus draws from this is:

'So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God' (Luke 12 : 13-21).

*c.* The 'excuses': an invitation to a dinner is declined by various people with all sorts of polite flourishes and excuses; in consequence the dinner is shared by others who in no way expected such a thing and were most unlikely candidates for it. Will the invitation to come to God and receive his salvation be accepted or not? If not, it will go to others. Originally an admonition to the Jews to heed God's call in Jesus (Luke 14 : 15-24).

*d.* Luke 15 gives three parables, all of which illustrate how God seeks after that which is lost (cf. vv. 1-2). That of the 'lost sheep' indicates that God bears each and every one singly and separately in mind, and that in his kingdom it is not just numbers that count. The story of the 'lost penny' teaches us how much trouble and care God takes over the search for what has been lost. Best known of all is the parable of the 'prodigal son': the young man who makes a getaway from the parental home because the world has so much more to offer, but after many bitter experiences finds his way home again and—contrary to what he had expected—is made welcome. But notice that the story does not end with verse 24, but at verse 32; for there is another son, who has always stayed at home but will not share in the father's rejoicing—and it is really *he* who is the 'lost son'! Jesus is getting at the Pharisees here and is warning them that a man can be professedly near to God and yet be far from him.

*e.* 'The rich man and the beggar, Lazarus': in the hereafter roles can be reversed; true religion is of more importance than riches (Luke 16 : 19-31).

*f.* The 'Pharisee and the publican': the former boasted before God of his superiority; the latter could only beg forgiveness. The Pharisee remained what he was before—



The Sea of Galilee

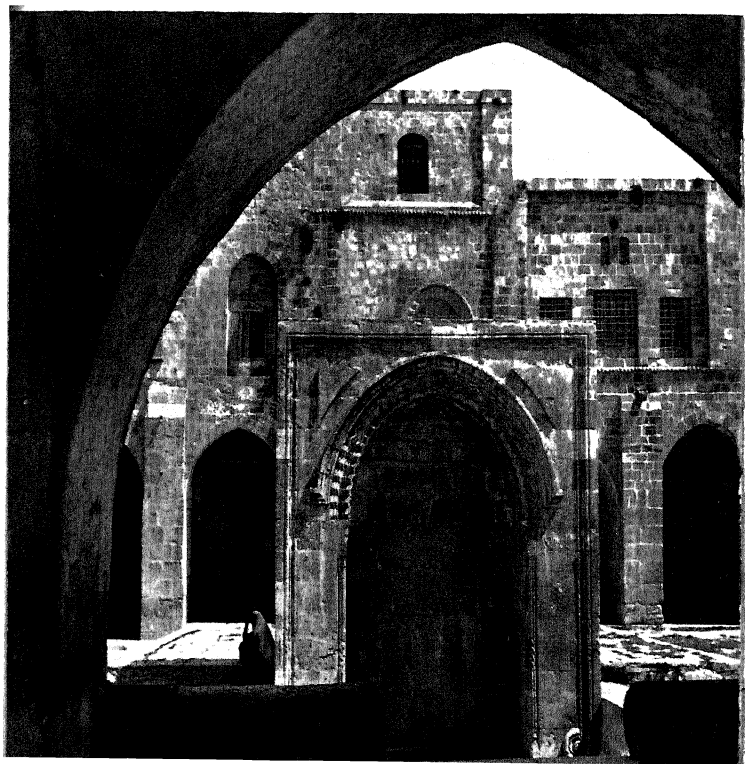
Jericho and the Jordan valley from the Mount of Temptation





Roman bankers

The Temple Area, Jerusalem



a man proud of himself; the publican was set right with God (Luke 18 : 9-14).

*g.* The 'debtor', who was excused payment of a large sum which he could not command, but himself insisted on bleeding another man for a small amount. Since man has received mercy from God, he is to show mercy towards his fellows (Matt. 18 : 21 ff.).

*h.* The 'labourers in the vineyard': those who have done a whole day's work get no more than what had been agreed upon, or than others who had put in only one hour's work. Here Jesus is pointing out that the salvation of God is his gift and is the same for all (Matt. 20 : 1-16).

*i.* 'The wise and foolish bridesmaids': the former had been sensible and had reckoned with the possibility that it might very well be late before the marriage procession arrived, which they were to wait upon; but the second group had not thought of this, became short of oil for their lamps and so found themselves shut out from the feast. Jesus meant to rouse men with this parable to be ready and on the look out for the coming of God's kingdom (Matt. 25 : 1-13).

*j.* The 'talents': a gentleman who went away on a journey entrusted his money to his slaves; they did not all get the same amount: two speculated with the money; but the third, who had the least, neglected to do so. The first two were commended, the other condemned. We must put the gifts that God gives us to work and not leave them unused (Matt. 25 : 14 ff.).

*k.* The 'separating of the sheep and the goats' as a picture of the judgment. The touchstone here is whether one has shown concern for the poor and oppressed, in whom Jesus himself is secretly present. 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' This

criterion would appear to be quite different from what people expected (Matt. 25 : 31 ff.).

1. The parables in Matthew 13 and parallels (hidden treasure, pearl of great price, etc.) point above all to the precious yet secret presence of the kingdom of God, which moves silently onward and will eventually be distinguished and separated, at the day of judgment, from all that is contrary to the divine, even if for the present it remains inextricably mingled with it.

In his general activity and in his method of instruction Jesus resembled the Jewish pedagogues of his time. Like them he was surrounded by an entourage of disciples. Like them too he was habitually addressed as 'rabbi' (i.e. 'Sir', the title of a man of learning) or as 'Master'. Yet those who heard him detected in his way of addressing them something that set him apart from their familiar instructors (cf. Matt. 7 : 29: 'for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their Scribes'). Jesus appealed, not to a line of predecessors but to the testimony of God himself (John 7 : 16 ff.). His teaching was not based on a hair-splitting examination of the words of the Law; instead, it was couched in terms of 'I tell you . . .' (Matt. 5 : 27 ff.). There was something quite distinctive, something different, about what he taught and about his way of teaching it, even if what he said did accord at many points with various pronouncements made by the rabbis.

He did not confine himself, however, to preaching, but supported what he said by the extraordinary things he did. This aspect of Jesus's ministry made such a forceful impression that in the brief summary of his life given in Acts 10 : 38 it monopolizes the picture. Even in the account of his very earliest preaching in public we read how he healed somebody with an 'unclean spirit' and other

sick people (Mark 1 : 23 ff., 32 ff.); and that was only a beginning.

Here, there and everywhere in the Gospels we read about the miracles which Jesus did. He healed a man suffering from leprosy—an affliction which had made him an outcast from society (Mark 1 : 40 ff. and parallels). To the crippled he restored the use of their limbs (Mark 2 : 1 ff.; 3 : 1 ff. and parallels), to the blind their sight (John 9 : 1 ff.) and to the deaf their powers of speech (Mark 7 : 31 ff.). We are told again and again how Jesus restored to their 'wits'—to full possession of their right mind—people who were demented, were haunted by an evil or an unclean spirit, that is, by a spirit opposed to God (Mark 11 : 23 ff.; 5 : 1 ff. and parallels). The evangelists even cite cases of the dead being resuscitated (the widow of Nain's son, Luke 7 : 11 ff.; the daughter of Jairus, Mark 5 : 21 ff. and Lazarus, John 11). But it was not simply a matter of curing and healing. When the disciples were on the point of sending the crowd away hungry because there was not enough food available, Jesus came to the rescue by multiplying the loaves (Mark 6 : 35 ff. and parallels).

Jesus performed these miracles sometimes at a touch, sometimes with a few words, commanding the unclean spirits to depart (Mark 1 : 25, 41; John 9 : 6). In one particular instance we are told how Jesus sensed that power had gone out of him (Mark 5 : 30).

For the people of the ancient world such miracles were not so strange as for modern men, who are inclined to speak here of an 'overriding or breaking of the laws of nature'. There are many and various accounts of miracle-workers; this is so even with the Jewish rabbis. Jesus acknowledged the fact himself—not only in the case of someone who makes use of his name as though he were a disciple, whilst not actually being one (Mark 9 : 38; cf.

Mark 6 : 7, 13), but also in connection with the 'sons of the rabbis' (Matt. 12 : 27: 'if I cast out demons by Beëlzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges'). Men saw in these things the manifestation of a superhuman power, either of good or of evil. For what it meant in the life of Jesus see below.

These miraculous acts of Jesus made a deep impression. When an evil spirit had been expelled, people said: 'What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him' (Mark 1 : 27). Peter is sensible of the distance which separates him from Jesus: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord' (Luke 5 : 26). Filled with amazement, the disciples ask one another: 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?' (Mark 4 : 41); or people exclaim: 'He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak' (Mark 7 : 37). It is understandable therefore that from every side men and women crowded in to seek healing, merely to touch him; or they would cry out like blind Bartimæus (Mark 10 : 46 ff.): 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

The miracles subserve Jesus's task; their purpose is to show who he is and what he comes to do. There is a passage in Mark (2 : 1 ff.) which makes that clear enough: the crippled are brought to be healed, but Jesus pronounces them free of their sins; if that is too much to believe, well, there is always the cure—that is effected in order 'that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' In John, chapter 9, the healing of the man born blind is accomplished in order that the mighty works of God may be made manifest (verse 3). A man is to be healed even on the sabbath, because the end in view is to save his life (Mark 3 : 4). When John the Baptist, in prison, has misgivings about who Jesus is and sends to enquire



whether he really is the promised one, Jesus's reply rings forth: 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them' (Luke 7 : 22). That which the prophets proclaimed in the Old Testament now comes into operation. In the 'nature miracles' is manifested the power which Jesus exercises over forces hitherto unbridled and unsubdued. The multiplication of the loaves speaks of his love for men. That is why St. John's Gospel invariably uses the term 'sign' (John 2 : 11; 6 : 2). What we have here is a kind of miniature demonstration of, and signpost to, the great work which Jesus comes to carry through, an incidental sign or token of his salvation.

Therefore Jesus asks for faith. Of the gentile captain he declares: 'Not even in Israel have I found such faith' (Luke 7 : 9). To the anxious disciples he exclaims: 'What, have you no faith!' (Mark 4 : 40). Again and again after some act of healing he would say: 'Go in peace; your faith has made you well' (Mark 5 : 34; 10 : 52). The point is made once more, very plainly, in the case of the deaf lad who was cured (Mark 9 : 14 ff.). Where there is no faith, no action on the part of Jesus is forthcoming (Mark 6 : 5). The things done by Jesus are not the feats of a magician or spellbinder anxious to please people; rather, their function is to awaken this faith, as one can see from John 6 : 26: 'You seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.' The very reason why so many accounts of healings are included is that disease serves to express the fundamental flaw in the creation, brought about by sin. Jesus is the restorer. The emphasis is always on that point, on sin as resistance to, or defection from, God. See, for example, John 5 : 14:

'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.'

Jesus's opponents ascribed his power to 'Beëlzebul' (literally, 'lord of the Palace'—a name for Satan); but Jesus countered with the remark that the kingdom of Satan cannot continue solely through driving out evil spirits (Mark 3 : 20 ff.). In the colloquy between the Jewish leaders and the man born blind who had been cured (John 9 : 24 ff.) the central issue is how Jesus is able to do such a thing; and the answer is plain: 'If this man were not from God, he could do nothing' (verse 33). The standpoint from which all these things are to be considered is indicated by Jesus himself, where he says: 'If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11 : 20). The proper setting of this activity is within the wide context of the kingdom of God (see the following section).

#### *6. Jesus's proclamation by word and deed, II*

The ministry of Jesus brought him very early on into conflict with leading members of his nation. One thing that gave rise to repeated clashes was the fact that Jesus healed on the sabbath day, when except for what was strictly necessary all work was forbidden (Mark 3 : 1 ff. and parallels; John 5 : 1 ff.). He calmly permitted his disciples to pluck ears of corn on this day of rest (Mark 2 : 23 ff.); for 'the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.' In many sayings Jesus let fly fiercely at the purely external manner in which the Jews discharged their obligation towards God. Their religion consisted in fulfilling a round of duties, but it did not engage the heart (see e.g. Matt. 6 : 1 ff.; especially the collection of sayings in Matt. 23). With all the rules that served to elaborate and

interpret the Law—the ‘traditions of the fathers’—men had deftly rendered the Word of God itself inoperative. Hence therefore Isaiah’s hard saying: ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’ (Matt. 15 : 1 ff. and parallels). ‘Hypocrite’ was a word frequently on the lips of Jesus, because so many men kept up a mere outward show of religion.

In his dealings with people Jesus did not abide by the rules which every punctilious Jew considered it essential to observe. He consorted with people who were generally despised, such as publicans (see p. 48). He let himself be anointed by a disreputable woman (Luke 5 : 30; 7 : 39). Because of the man’s conduct, he set a despised Samaritan above both priest and Levite (Luke 10 : 30 ff.). Jesus’s attitude quite obviously sprang from a sense of his mission; cf. Luke 5 : 32 and parallels: ‘I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’ When his presence has such an effect on the chief tax-gatherer, Zacchaeus, that the man makes restitution of all his ill-gotten gains as the Law requires (cf. Exod. 22 : 1), Jesus says: ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19 : 9, 10).

Time after time Jesus breaks through the barriers that people take for granted. That is one reason why his message encounters so much hostility. He repeatedly upbraids the Jews for their stubbornness. Jerusalem does not understand, he says, what is necessary to her peace; for it is hidden from those who dwell in her (Luke 19 : 42). A good deal is said too, here and there, about the disciples’ failure to understand what their Master says and does. Even after the resurrection we still hear the cry: ‘O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe!’ (Luke 24 : 25.) This is particularly true in connection with what Jesus says of his

Passion (Luke 9 : 45; 18 : 34). John too, in his account of the entry into Jerusalem (p. 78) which fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah (9 : 9), remarks: 'His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him' (John 12 : 16; cf. 2 : 22). His coming brings with it an element of total newness—hence the injunction to the disciples not to fast (a sign of mourning) so long as he is among them, any more than one would dream of fasting at a wedding feast (Mark 2 : 18 ff. and parallels).

Jesus led, in broad terms, the life of a Jew. For him the Old Testament was the one revelation of the one God; and in various sayings he shows himself in accord with it. But in a matter like the sabbath one sees how, although accepting this day of rest, he makes it subserve the wellbeing of men. Jesus saw the events of his own life foreshadowed in the pronouncements of the Old Testament prophets. What they had once promised now comes to pass. One may see this from his behaviour when, on a visit to Nazareth, he reads from Isaiah 61 and declares: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4 : 14 ff.). The disciples were indeed slow to understand what Moses and the prophets had written about Jesus.

In reading the Gospels one is perpetually being brought up against the fact that this Jesus is more than a 'teacher', that he possesses power and authority in more than human measure. Who is he then? That is the question to which the Gospel narratives persistently return and to which, taken together and as a whole, they provide an answer. On one occasion Jesus puts to his disciples the question: 'Who do men say that I am?' (Mark 8 : 27 ff. and parallels). The gist of their reply is that men see in him one of the prophets, and more particularly the Elijah of the Old

Testament, who was expected to return (p. 78). The Gospels make it abundantly clear that Jesus was regarded as a prophet not only by his adherents but even by such men as Simon the Pharisee, who was unable to believe, having been put off by the fact that Jesus did not condemn the woman who had sinned (Mark 6 : 4; Luke 7 : 16, 39; 24 : 19; John 6 : 14; 7 : 40). He is then the One sent specifically by God to make known his will, and the mighty prophet expected by the Jews in the 'latter days'. But Jesus went on to ask his disciples for their own opinion; whereupon Peter said: 'You are the Christ' (p. 76), that is, the final deliverer who is to bring in the kingdom of God. The Gospels repeatedly describe Jesus, in the third person, as the 'Son of Man', that is, the figure alluded to in Daniel 7 : 13, 14, who is coming to rule the world with justice, but will appear on earth incognito, in the likeness of a man: 'And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days . . . and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.'

Yet he is one who will obtain this dominion only through suffering and dissolution, and so is far from being the national messiah of popular expectation (p. 77). Jesus sees the true messiah prefigured in the Servant of the Lord, of whom Isaiah had spoken. That much was clear already at his baptism (Mark 1 : 11). According to Isaiah 53, this Servant is the one destined to suffer, who saves others by his death, and through shame and loss enters into his glory (Luke 24 : 26).

*Isaiah* 53: 'He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should

desire him. He was despised and rejected by men. . . . Surely he has borne our sicknesses . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole . . . all we like sheep have gone astray . . . and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . like a lamb that is led to the slaughter . . . he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities . . . because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.'

When Peter perceives Jesus to be the messiah, Jesus explains that it has not become plain to him through any merely human process of thought, but because God has himself revealed it to him (Matt. 16 : 17). The incognito is not to be discarded, however, until the very end of the road. That is why Jesus forbids the disciples to disclose the 'secret' prior to the resurrection. It is the same with the evil spirits. They know very well with whom it is they are dealing; but Jesus commands them not to speak of it openly (Mark 1 : 24, 25).

Jesus was able to speak and act in this way because he worked 'by the finger of God', because 'God was with him' (Acts 10 : 38), because he was in a unique sense the Son of God. That was declared at his baptism, when a voice was heard exclaiming: 'Thou art my beloved Son' (Mark 1 : 11); and it was repeated during the transfiguration on the mountain (Mark 9 : 7 and parallels). Jesus referred explicitly to it in his prayer: 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them

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to babes . . . All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11 : 25-27; but see also Luke 2 : 49). And so this is immediately followed by the invitation of the Saviour: 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'

The way of Jesus, arduous and obscure though it might be (p. 84 f.), was predicted in Old Testament prophecies; and it was there that he perceived it. Hence that 'must' which echoes like a divine refrain through every presentiment of his Passion (Mark 8 : 31 and parallels). He comes therefore to serve. His dominion is not like that of the great ones of this world, but consists in humble service; 'for the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (i.e. the price of emancipation, in this case, from sin) for many' (Mark 10 : 45). His death was not the dramatic downfall of someone who meant well but failed to achieve his purpose. Rather, it enables us to see that the kingdom of God is founded on the principle of service and obedience to the will of the Father.

Jesus had himself to learn that obedience (Heb. 5 : 8). In the temptation in the wilderness (p. 70) he is offered (worldly) dominion as a reward for worshipping Satan. This he thrusts aside; but not until after his Passion and resurrection can he say: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'—given, that is, by God himself, who has glorified his Son (Matt. 28 : 18). Throughout his life the Christ had to tread a hard and perilous way. He did so by withdrawing often into the solitude of prayer; and by thus conversing constantly with his Father (Luke 5 : 16; 6 : 12; 9 : 18, 28; 11 : 1; 22 : 44 ff.), he enjoyed

a communion which sustained him and strengthened him for his task.

In all that he says and does Jesus is bent on making men aware of the kingdom of God (Matthew prefers 'kingdom of heaven', which means the same thing; 'heaven' is a Jewish periphrasis for 'God'). The notion of God as King is in complete accord with Old Testament ideas. The actual state of affairs, however, only goes to show that men have rebelled against God, have defected from him, so that in this world the kingdom of righteousness and peace, of glad submission to his will, simply does not prevail. Jesus speaks of that kingdom and explains what is required of us if we would make that condition of true happiness and wellbeing our own. His own actions make it plain for all to see; for the kingdom is coming, and yet already *is*. In driving out the demons he shows that the kingdom is present (see p. 102). When the disciples return from their missionary tour, Jesus cries out in relief and gratitude: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!' (Luke 10 : 18). In his person has at last been realized that which prophets and kings longed for (Luke 10 : 24): the kingdom of the new Covenant (p. 12), which he establishes by his death (cf. the words spoken at the Last Supper).

Through the work of Jesus men come to know God in an intimate relationship as 'the Father, who is in heaven'—the appositive clause here signifying the grandeur and majesty of the Godhead. That bond between God and man is not something axiomatic. It had been shattered by human sin, but is re-established through the forgiveness of sins, which the Christ proclaims. There is nothing here which man achieves for or by himself. He simply receives it. The story of Jesus's conduct towards the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7 : 36 ff.), the parable of the Prodigal



Son (Luke 15 : 11 ff.) and that of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18 : 9 ff.) are all intended to drive home this vital truth.

Yet it is not true that what men do is neither here nor there; for their actions are subject to God's judgment. What really matters is that God's will be done. Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom and that his will might be carried out on earth as in heaven (Matt. 6 : 10). But this prayer is a call to *action*. 'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7 : 21). When people spoke to Jesus about his family, his rejoinder was: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mark 3 : 35). This is brought out very vividly in the description of the 'Last Judgment' (Matt. 25 : 31 ff.). The approaching judgment of God, which precedes the final coming of the kingdom, is a recurrent theme in Jesus's preaching (e.g. Matt. 13 : 49 f., 25 : 14 ff.: the parable of the talents).

What the will of God is Jesus expressed very succinctly in the words of the Great Commandment (Matt. 22 : 34 ff. and parallels): 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The passage is a combination of two Old Testament sayings, Deuteronomy 6 : 5 and Leviticus 19 : 18; and in setting them side by side Jesus gives to each a fresh significance in relation to the other. Instead of making the basic principle of the kingdom issue in an interminable chain of injunctions and prohibitions of ever-increasing particularity and detail, Jesus in these two sayings puts the whole of life under God's command. Under the term 'neighbour'

he includes all human beings, Jews and Gentiles, the pious and the pagan, without exception or reservation of any kind. 'But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish' (Luke 6 : 35).

Jesus calls upon all who wish to belong to—and be fit for—this kingdom of God to repent (Mark 1 : 15; Luke 13 : 1 ff.), to break with the old life and to conform themselves to God's will. In order to do that they must become 'childlike' (Mark 10 : 15 and parallels) and must humbly follow the Master who was himself a servant (Luke 14 : 7-11; Mark 10 : 43 ff.). Having obtained so great forgiveness themselves, they must learn to forgive others (Matt. 18 : 21 ff.: parable of the debtors). When quarrels arose among the disciples over questions of precedence and privilege, Jesus always referred them to this (Matt. 20 : 20 ff. and parallels; Luke 22 : 24 ff.); for the standards which apply in the kingdom of God are quite different from those of this world. That much is clear from the sayings in which Jesus speaks of the blessedness of all sorts of people who are despised here on earth or who suffer want and loss (Matt. 5 : 2 ff.; contrast the 'woes' in Luke 6 : 24 ff.): the poor, the hungry, the mourners—in the kingdom of God all these will enter into their own. Jesus uttered a stern warning about the dangers of being excessively preoccupied with this earthly life (Matt. 6 : 24 ff.) and with riches (cf. the incident of the 'rich young man': Luke 18 : 18 ff. and parallels). Men should work for the true treasure which neither rust nor moth can consume (Matt. 6 : 19 ff.); for 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' It was because Jesus was wide awake to the risks, to the struggle within and without, which this could mean for his disciples that he urged them to be very much on the

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alert (Luke 12 : 35 ff. and parallels). The disciples would need to find their strength in prayer, in the assurance that God would hear them (Matt. 7 : 7 ff.).

And so in the simplest and briefest possible way Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the words of the 'perfect prayer':

Father, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread;

and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive  
every one who is indebted to us;

and lead us not into temptation.

Thus the text of Luke 11 : 2-4. The text usually employed in the worship of the church follows Matthew 6 : 9-13. But Jesus would certainly never intend us to stick slavishly to that familiar version; so the wording given here is that of Luke.

Many will fall away; and this will be especially true in the coming crisis which presages the end. It will prove a difficult and costly business to remain faithful to God's commands. The gate through which men must enter is a narrow one, seeing that many influences are bound to make themselves felt which will lead them spiritually astray (Matt. 7 : 13 ff.). If they are to be his disciples, men will have to follow the Master in his path of suffering and confess him as their Lord before the rulers of the earth (cf. Mark 13 and parallels); but Jesus promises that they will not lack the support of God's Spirit in such circumstances. And 'he who endures to the end will be saved.'

It is not possible to do more here than pick out, from the enormous fund of material bequeathed to us by the evangelists, some examples of stories and sayings employed by Jesus to show how he brings the kingdom of God with

him into this world. One thing at least is clear: that with the coming of Jesus and his ministry there appears within this workaday world of ours, within this mundane order, a very different order of reality. It may not be immediately apparent; but it operates like a grain of wheat which, once having dropped into the ground, silently and secretly brings forth its fruit. For 'the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you' (Luke 17 : 20, 21). To go into that kingdom is the sublimest thing to which a man can attain; for there and there alone is he fully a child of God. To be outside it, however, is the depth of wretchedness and 'the outermost darkness' (Matt. 8 : 12; 22 : 13).

According to Matthew, Jesus rounded off the summary of his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount with a parable which makes it quite clear that men are faced here with a crucial choice:

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell and the floods came, and the wind blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it' (Matt. 7 : 24 ff.).

Jesus addressed his challenge to the nation whose vocation it was to be the people of God and a light to the world. But as we have already seen from the account of his life, the men of that nation did not respond; instead, they had Jesus crucified as a dangerous criminal. Although

at first the crowds thronged him and he was surrounded with followers, the great mass of people soon forsook him. It was only among a small circle of disciples that he found a genuinely responsive audience—and even they often failed to grasp what he was getting at. Not until after his resurrection did they come to understand him (p. 103; and see Peter's speeches in Acts: e.g., 2 : 22 ff.; 3 : 12 ff.; 4 : 8 ff.; 10 : 37 ff.). It was indeed a tiny group of followers whom Jesus urged not to be afraid; 'for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12 : 32). When he sent them out, they were as sheep in the midst of wolves (Luke 10 : 3). They also felt the full brunt of the attack designed to ensure that Jesus would be deserted and alone when he went to meet his death (Luke 22 : 31, 32). In fact, the effect of the Cross upon their whole circle was devastating (see p. 91). Jesus may have appointed the kingdom for them (Luke 22 : 29); but at his departure they were a sorry little band of men. Nevertheless, they formed the nucleus of the new people (cf. p. 73). In the kingdom of God numbers are not what finally matters; and so they could rest assured that where two or three were gathered in the name of Jesus, he was in their midst (Matt. 18 : 20).

Jesus had gone away; and if that fact, taken by itself, were anything to go by, we might fairly conclude that his work had ended in frustration and failure and that we could hope for nothing more from the whole affair. What an extraordinary thing it seems—and what a gamble too—to hand over to a little group of illiterate and irresolute people the task of evangelizing an entire world (Matt. 28 : 19)! It was only possible, of course, because the one to whom all power had been given had also given them his promise: 'I am with you' (Matt. 28 : 18, 20). What was at any rate by all human standards of judgment the 'lost

cause' of Jesus once again demonstrates the truth of the principle of the grain of wheat: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12 : 24). The cause of Christ was not lost; on the contrary, it survived to see the downfall of Jewry's temple and the end of the mighty Roman Empire itself. Even persecution could not check its progress. For the church has the promise of her Lord that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16 : 18). Jesus left this earth, not to flee but to ascend a throne. 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'

The account which the foregoing pages present of the life and work of Jesus Christ has been drawn largely from the evidence supplied by the synoptic Gospels (see p. 55). In the Gospel according to John the outlines are the same, but are transposed, so to speak, into a different idiom. One noticeable feature with John is that Jesus does not teach by parables but makes his preaching in this Gospel revolve much more about a few large themes, the foremost of which is his disclosure of his own relation to God and to men. There is less emphasis on what is required of men and on how men are to apply that demand to the practical affairs of this life; but this is not to say, of course, that it is entirely absent. John's Gospel also has the famous injunction to the disciples: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another' (John 13 : 34; 15 : 12, 13). It is John who brings out so clearly—and in a manner one is not likely to forget—exactly who the Saviour of the world is.

This comes out clearest of all in those sayings where Jesus constantly uses the formula: 'I am . . .': the bread of life (John 6 : 48), the light of the world (John 8 : 12), the door

and the shepherd of the sheep (John 10 : 7, 9, 11, 14), the true vine (John 15 : 1). He has been sent into the world by the Father (John 5 : 36; 8 : 15; 12 : 44, 49). Herein was manifested the love of the Father for the world (John 3 : 16, 17). There is a direct reference to his sacrificial death, when John the Baptist exclaims: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1 : 29). In particular, the contrast between light and darkness is used to express what had separated and divided the world from God. 'Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil' (John 3 : 19). Jesus is God's Son; but the Jews reject his testimony. It is endorsed and upheld, however, by God himself (John 5 : 19 ff.; 7 : 14 ff.). All this confronts men with a parting of the ways. It divides those who respond from those who reject, those who believe from those who do not (ch. 7). Jesus's coming brings with it the gift of 'eternal life', which does not pass away but abides for ever (John 6 : 27 ff.). What this gift is the 'High-priestly Prayer' defines in the words: 'This is eternal life, that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent' (John 17 : 3). The sacrifice of Jesus's life, whereby God 'lifts him up', is the *locus* of salvation (John 3 : 14, 15). For his disciples the Christ predicts suffering and the world's hatred; but alongside his warning that 'in the world you shall have tribulation' must be set the triumphant cry: 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' Jesus's departure means, of course, that his followers are inevitably separated from him. It does not, however, mean that their ties with him are broken in any way; for he promises to send them the Holy Spirit as an abiding comforter (John 16 : 5 ff.). Their sadness is transformed therefore into lasting joy (John 16 : 16 ff.). It all goes to show that Jesus's kingdom is not of this world (John 18 : 36). Yet he lives in order to

bestow life, an abundance of life. He gives an arresting description of his mission in the picture of the Good Shepherd who risks everything, even life itself, for his sheep (ch. 10). Whoever has this bond with Jesus will always be safe in his keeping (John 10 : 28).

‘I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness’ (John 12 : 46). It should now be clear how the Gospels portray this man Jesus, the Galilean rabbi who went to Jerusalem to become the victim, the crucified one, in whose person the kingdom of God breaks in upon this world. His coming presented the men of his own time with a choice. It has always been so, and is so still today. Whoever encounters him, whoever has been laid hold of by him, has been shown ‘the way, the truth, and the life’, because in meeting with Jesus a man meets with God. ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14 : 9).



## IV. *The Work of Jesus Continues*

### 1. *The initial stages*

Three of the evangelists finished their books with an account of Jesus's resurrection and his parting from the disciples (see pp. 91-93). Only Luke added to his Gospel a 'second volume' (Acts 1 : 1) which since the 2nd century has borne the title of *The Acts of the Apostles*. This title is hardly likely to have been Luke's own, because it certainly leads us to expect that we shall hear at any rate something about all the apostles (see p. 73)—which is not in fact the case. Many of them—Thomas and Andrew, for example—are not mentioned at all; and there are others, such as John and James, about whom we are told very little indeed. In the earlier part of the story Peter is the central figure, whereas in the latter part the place of honour is given to Paul. If you look up on the map the place-names occurring in this book, you will notice that there are large areas of the world left completely out of the picture. For instance, there is nothing about Egypt. Admittedly, Acts 28 : 15 informs us that there are Christians in Rome; but it does not tell us how Christianity got there in the first place. It is remarkable too that after Acts 15 we hear nothing more about Peter or what fate was in store for him. Again, although the book describes how Paul was made prisoner and brought to Rome, it says nothing about how things turned out for him afterwards (see p. 138).

Luke dedicated this second volume to an acquaintance

of his, Theophilus, not in order to bring to his notice the many trials and tribulations of Jesus's followers so much as to show him and others how the work begun by Jesus was being pressed forward. The apostles had been 'witnesses' to the risen Jesus, i.e. had seen him with their own eyes (Acts 1 : 22); and it was their job as trustworthy witnesses to proclaim the fact throughout the whole world (Acts 1 : 8). It is noticeable how constantly the word 'witnesses' recurs in this book. Luke is bent on showing how the good news of the one and only name among men by which they are to be 'saved' (Acts 4 : 12) was being extended to ever wider and wider circles of people. In his Gospel Luke is concerned with what Jesus came on earth to do; but in the Acts he is describing how the glad tidings of Jesus were spread abroad. Luke's method of demonstrating his point is to present a number of characteristic stories. He describes the resistance which the gospel encounters, but also its marvellous progress in spite of everything. He does not set out to record every minute detail, but rather to give us an idea of what seemed to him to be of decisive importance. Look, he is saying, the liberating work of Jesus does not peter out—it moves forward to the very 'end of the earth' (Acts 1 : 8). That is why Luke's book has no real ending—for the story does not end with his final chapter.

The apostles convey the message of deliverance in a variety of ways. Of course, they proclaim who Jesus was and what God has done through him; but they also support their preaching by working miracles as a visible proof of their claims. God's work goes forward, and nothing can stop it! Such is the gist of the message writ large over the pages of this second part of the New Testament.

Then apart from the Acts, there is a good deal in the Epistles which stand after it that bears directly on the

continued progress of the work of Jesus. We shall be attending to that later on. Here we are concerned more especially with what Acts has to tell us about the initial growth of the church *prior* to the arrival of Paul on the scene.

Acts begins with the departure of Jesus, his ascension into heaven (see p. 92). Just before Jesus left his disciples he instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until they were imbued with power from on high, with the strength to set about their task. That task was to witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, throughout the country of the Jews and in the rest of the world (Acts 1:7-8). Being only simple, unlearned men, they could not do this in their own strength (Acts 4:13); for the fierce opposition which they would encounter was bound to make them feel very downcast. People would simply refuse to credit the message, unless and until God himself opened their eyes. The disciples did as Jesus had commanded; and in order to restore the full complement of twelve (see p. 73) they chose, under God's direction, a certain Matthias to take the place of the traitor Judas (Acts 1:15 ff.; see also pp. 86, 87). Next to nothing is known about Matthias beyond the fact of his election.

Ten days after the ascension the Jews celebrated the Feast of Weeks (Exod. 23:16), also known as Pentecost (from the Greek word for 'fiftieth'). Whilst they were gathered together in the temple, the apostles were possessed by the Spirit of God, just as Jesus had promised. The result was that they began to speak in foreign languages. The crowds of pilgrims from many different parts of the world confessed themselves astonished to hear the mighty works of God proclaimed in their own tongues. So far as preaching was concerned therefore, the language barrier proved to be no obstacle (Acts 2:1 ff.). At once there

was an unfriendly reaction, some of those present arguing that the apostles were drunk. Others wanted to know what all this was about; and Peter dealt with their questions in a lengthy speech.

Peter took his cue from some words of the Old Testament prophet, Joel, who had declared that at the 'latter day' God would give his Spirit to all and sundry, without any distinction; that amid fearsome signs and wonders the end of the world would come, but that every one who called on the name of the Lord would be kept in safety (i.e. 'saved'). Who then is this 'Lord' whose name men must know and invoke? It is Jesus, who has been sent into the world by God, but whom the Jews have crucified. However, God had done something quite unprecedented in raising him from the dead and causing him to be 'glorified'. God has made this Jesus 'both Lord and Christ'. So Peter summons the Jews to repentance. They must acknowledge Jesus, whom they have rejected, as the one sent to them from God, must repent of their sins and start living according to God's will. Then they are to be incorporated, through baptism, into the people of the New Covenant.

The outcome of Peter's preaching on these lines was that many among his audience repented and 'joined themselves to the apostles' fellowship'. Thus there appeared in Jerusalem the first Christian church. It was a close-knit community, taking guidance from the apostles, coming together for common prayer and a meal and placing all its goods and chattels at the disposal of the group as a whole (Acts 2 : 42 ff.).

Although believers in Christ, they still lived as members of the Jewish people—the apostles, for instance, continuing to visit the temple. It was on one such occasion that Peter and John healed a crippled beggar. They did not give him what he expected, namely, a gift of money; but in

the name and by the power of Jesus they gave him back his health and strength. This wonderful event gave Peter further opportunity to speak about Jesus, who had been rejected by men but exalted and glorified by God; and once more he issued a call to repentance (Acts 3).

When one compares the various speeches in Acts with one another, it becomes apparent that although there are internal differences of this or that sort, the main outlines are to a great extent the same. The theme in every case is that Jesus, whom men have crucified, has been raised up by God, has endowed his spokesmen with authority and power and will presently come to judge the living and the dead. Men are called upon again and again to accept this same Jesus as Lord.

Among the leaders of the Jewish people who had been responsible for condemning Jesus in the first place (p. 83) such preaching aroused opposition, because it implied, of course, that what they had done was wrong and that they had set themselves up against God. They had the apostles Peter and John arrested and brought before the courts. Peter pointed—not without irony—to the strange circumstance that they had been brought to book for doing an act of kindness to a sick man; and he used the occasion to preach the Christian message yet again. No definite reason could be found for punishing them; and so they were released, with the admonition that they were to do no more preaching in the name of Jesus. It was then that the apostles uttered a momentous saying to the effect that one ought to obey God rather than men. Some time later, when the leading Sadducees (see p. 46 f.), for whom the resurrection was a sheer impossibility, had them taken once more into custody, the apostles repeated and indeed acted upon this sentiment. Unexpected support came from the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, who was actually a

member of the Jewish Council. He argued for letting the matter drop. If it were of God, he said, men would not be able to frustrate it; but if it were something merely human, it would die a natural death, like any other movement. The apostles were flogged; but even that did not persuade them to desist. On the contrary, they counted it a privilege to be made to suffer as followers of Jesus (chs. 4-5).

The church steadily increased—some of its members being drawn even from the priesthood (Acts 6 : 7). But there were difficulties ahead. One thing that made a deep impression was the death of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. This couple made out that they had put their entire property at the disposal of the church, whereas they had secretly withheld part of it (Acts 5 : 1 ff.). The incident showed that sin was still an active force in the community. Then further trouble arose within the fellowship, when the part of the church which consisted of Greek-speaking Jews accused the apostles of giving preferential treatment to their Hebrew-speaking compatriots. That particular problem was solved when a few outstanding individuals, men well and truly 'full of the Spirit', were appointed to attend to the business of looking after the poor and distressed (Acts 6 : 1 ff.). These men were called 'deacons' (i.e. servants). We know little or nothing about their special activities, but quite a lot about two of their number, Stephen and Philip, as preachers.

Stephen disputed with his fellow countrymen about the significance of Jesus, whereupon he was accused of undermining the foundations of the Jewish way of life, to wit, the temple cult and the Law of Moses. Required to defend himself, Stephen made a long speech in which he charged the Jews, on the evidence of their history, with unremitting

hostility towards God's messengers and refusal to understand his will. Such an onslaught was more than they could tolerate; and so Stephen was put to death and became the first 'martyr' (i.e. one who 'witnesses' with his blood). He died, as his Lord had done, with a prayer on his lips for the forgiveness of his murderers. His death triggered off a more systematic persecution of the Christians (Acts 7).

Up to that moment—if the account in Acts is to be trusted—the Christian community had been non-existent outside Jerusalem and had so far addressed its message only to the Jews. As yet, there was no question of its going forth 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). But that calamitous persecution drove the Christians away from Jerusalem. As refugees, they then carried the gospel further afield; for they would not abandon it, even to save their lives. One of these people was the deacon Philip, who carried on the good work in Samaria with considerable success. It was there that the apostles came in contact with a remarkable type of syncretism (see p. 36) in the person of one Simon, a sorcerer, who gave himself out to be 'the great power of God'. This man wanted to acquire still more 'power' by purchasing the Holy Spirit, yet without submitting himself heart and soul to God's will. Another noteworthy incident was Philip's encounter with a highly-placed official from Ethiopia. When at the command of an angel Philip made his way to a 'desert road', he suddenly fell in with this man who had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and now on the homeward journey was reading in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The Ethiopian enquired who the 'suffering servant of the Lord' (spoken of in Isaiah 53) really was; whereupon Philip was able to tell him that this prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus. The baptism of that Ethiopian, whose country lay at the edge

of the world as it was then known, afforded a first glimpse, as it were, of how the gospel makes its way to the ends of the earth in a fashion almost impossible for the human mind to conceive (Acts 8).

Peter pursued his preaching activities in the coastal area of Palestine. According to the record, he was involved in two events of a marvellous character, which helped to convert many people (Acts 9 : 32 ff.). One of these proved to be of profound and radical importance. It concerns the manner in which he was put in touch with a 'godfearing' (see p. 50) Roman officer named Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter was in Joppa at the time; and being hungry, he had a vision of a linen sheet filled with all sorts of things, including 'unclean' animals. Then he heard a voice telling him to eat of this food; but as a Law-abiding Jew he naturally refused. Whilst he was wondering what this could mean, some of Cornelius's soldiers arrived and asked him to go with them to Cæsarea. At last it dawned upon Peter what the real meaning of his vision was. From the orthodox Jewish point of view this 'godfearer' was little better than an unclean pagan, and one should have no truck with him at all; but through the vision God was pointing out to Peter that he had no right to regard any of God's creatures as unclean. He went therefore, preached the gospel to Cornelius at his home and all at once saw how the Holy Spirit laid hold on the people there too. Once more God was pointing the way—the way beyond one of this world's barriers which the apostle himself had not dared to cross. Peter realized that himself; for when a number of his fellow Christians in Jerusalem tax him with his conduct vis-à-vis Cornelius, he answers that it is not for men to stand in the way of God (Acts 11 : 1 ff.).

The events recorded in Acts 11 : 19 ff. are also of great significance for the progress of the gospel. Evidently, this



did not come about through a spectacular propaganda campaign, but developed spontaneously. Those who were scattered after Stephen's death made their way northwards to Damascus and Phœnicia and also reached the cosmopolitan city of Antioch. At first they restricted themselves to preaching among the big colonies of Jews living there; but almost without realizing it, they started proclaiming their message to 'the heathen'. There in Antioch, which was to play such a vital role in the expansion of Christianity (see p. 30), Jesus's disciples were first called 'Christians' (Acts 11 : 26).

If at the outset the apostles were left more or less unmolested, things soon altered under Herod Agrippa I (p. 42). In order to curry favour with the Jews he had James, the brother of John, executed and Peter arrested. Peter was miraculously freed from gaol. This Herod met with a frightful end, because he had permitted himself to be venerated in audience like a god, after the manner of heathen princes (Acts 12).

Not very much more is known, either of the further history of the church in Jerusalem or of the various apostles. At Acts 13 Luke turns to describing the activities of the man who did most, humanly speaking, to help spread the gospel (I Cor. 15 : 10): namely, Paul (see section 2 of this chapter).

It is evident, even from Paul's ministry, that at that period Jerusalem still constituted the earthly centre of the Christians, because it harboured the mother church. From that centre the apostles went out to establish bonds of community with new churches by the laying on of hands (Acts 8 : 14); and in times of famine the church in Jerusalem was cared for by other churches (Acts 11 : 29), for it was the place from which the gospel had been received (Rom. 15 : 27). In many respects the members of that

church continued to keep the Jewish Law (Acts 21 : 20). It was there too that a crucial decision was taken which affected the future of the entire church (see p. 132). Between A.D. 40 and 50 the leadership in Jerusalem fell more and more into the hands of James, the brother of the Lord Jesus. He had not originally been a follower of Jesus, but had been brought by the manifestations of the Risen Lord to faith in him (I Cor. 15 : 7). For his loyalty to the Law he was held in high regard by the Jews; and people called him 'the Just'. According to later church historians and to Josephus, he met his death during an insurrection in A.D. 62.

The situation in Jerusalem at that period was one of steadily mounting tension. Opposition to the Roman overlords and acts of hostility on the Jewish side increased sharply and were moving to a climax. Circumstances generally would appear to have been unfavourable to the Christians. They came to be known as 'Ebionites' (Hebrew for 'the poor') and turned for assistance to other churches. During the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70 (see p. 42) they shifted in some haste to Pella, a small place in Trans-jordania. The fall and destruction of Jerusalem meant that the dominance of that city and of the church there was at an end; Jerusalem ceased to be the centre of things. After that, the Christians' hope was no longer focused on an earthly Jerusalem. They looked rather for the 'heavenly Jerusalem' which is to come, the 'new creation' which of his bounty God will freely give (Rev. 21). As small splinter-groups, Jewish-Christian communities continued to exist in Palestine for several centuries, but never again did they play any significant role.

As regards the apostles, we know extremely little about how or where they lived. The last we hear of Peter is in Acts 15. Presumably, he carried the gospel here and there

among his fellow Jews of the diaspora (p. 48). The evidence for this activity which covered large areas of Asia Minor is to be found in the preamble to his first Letter (I Pet. 1 : 1). Possibly it took him as far as Babylonia (I Pet. 5 : 13), although that is by no means certain, because many authorities have it that 'Babylon', in I Peter 5 : 13, is a pseudonym for Rome. At all events tradition says that he reached the capital of the empire and died there as a martyr in the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64.

He did not establish the church in Rome. Nowhere in the New Testament—including the Letter to the Romans—is such a fact mentioned or even hinted at. Whether he was ever in Corinth is doubtful. Admittedly, Paul refers to 'adherents' of Peter in that place (I Cor. 1 : 12) and asks whether he does not have a right to the same prerogatives as Peter (I Cor. 9 : 1 ff.). In that connection he discloses that Peter was a married man (see also Mark 1 : 30) and that his wife travelled with him on his missionary journeys.

Nothing is heard of John, either, after Acts 15. Later tradition maintains that he laboured chiefly along the west coast of Asia Minor and died at a ripe old age in Ephesus, bequeathing to his fellow believers a Gospel, a number of letters and a 'Revelation' (see section 3 of this chapter).

In the course of centuries various legends have become associated with the names of certain other apostles (cf. p. 16). It is highly doubtful whether there is any historical foundation for the reports of Andrew's having preached in Asia Minor, and Thomas in India. As the centuries passed, more and more importance was attached to the fact—or the idea—that this or that particular church had been established by one or other of the apostles in person.

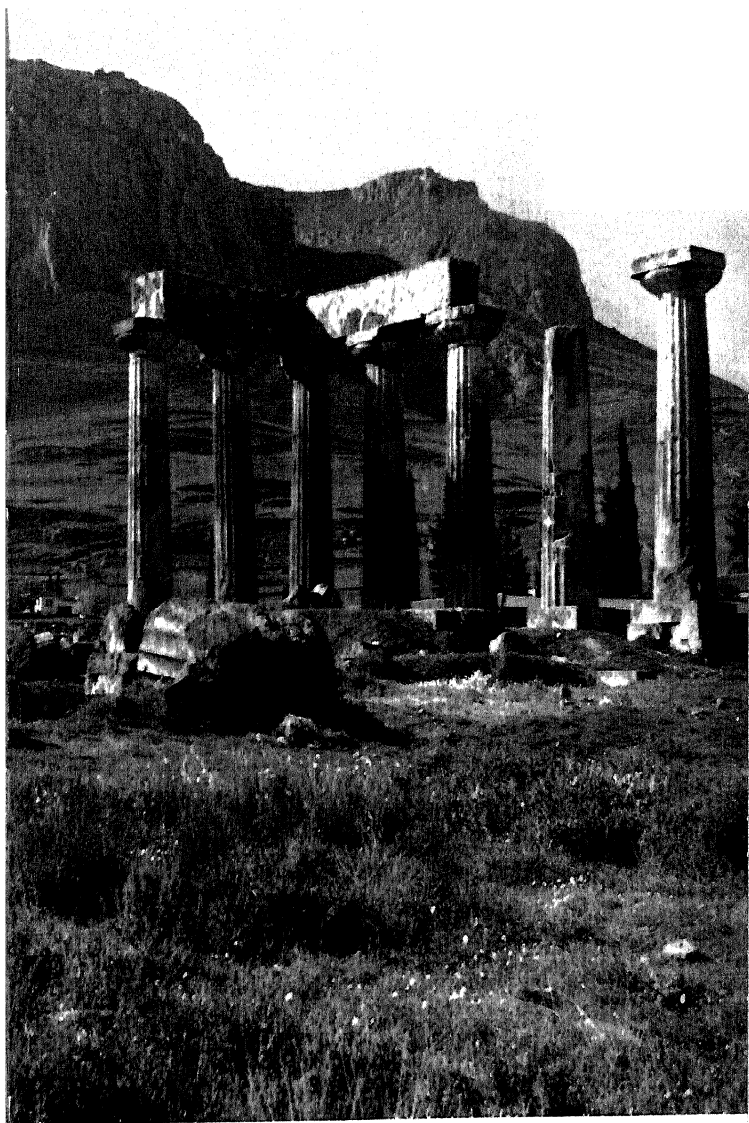
Such then were the initial stages of the proclamation of the gospel, beginning at Jerusalem and reaching further and

further afield in often quite extraordinary, even miraculous, ways. Those immediately concerned at the time did not at once grasp in which direction things were moving. The New Testament declares that it was God's leading through the Holy Spirit which pointed the way, now here, now there. Often it was a course which, for lack of sufficient data, we can no longer discern; but the thing grew. Forty years or so after Jesus had left this earth, his work had been extended into a great part of the known world. We can see in all this the realization of what Jesus had himself expressed in a parable thus: 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces fruit of itself (*automatoos*) . . .' (Mark 4: 26-28).

## 2. *Paul*

### A. HIS CAREER

In the foregoing sections the name of Paul has been mentioned several times already. This 'serving-man' (or 'slave') of the Lord Jesus, as he describes himself, was the outstanding means and instrument of propagating the message of Christ in the world. His personality and his work are known to us, not just from what Luke has reported in the Acts, but primarily from the several letters which he wrote to various churches or individuals. Some of these documents have been preserved and through their inclusion in the New Testament have exerted a world-wide influence on the course of history, an influence far-reaching and extending from his time to our own. Paul's preaching still does its work—and *that*, quite literally 'unto the ends of the earth'.



The Temple of Apollo at Corinth, sixth century BC

A statue of a Greek orator of the first century BC



Paul (literally, in Latin, 'the little one') was actually named Saul (like the Old Testament king). He came of an orthodox Jewish family (Philip. 3 : 5-6) from the city of Tarsus in Asia Minor. In early childhood he was brought to Jerusalem and there, in the holy city of Judaism, he grew up and received his education (Acts 22 : 3). He had thrown in his lot with the rigorist sect called the Pharisees (p. 46 f.); and in the manner of a Pharisee he had served his God with tremendous fanaticism and had helped to persecute the Christians (Acts 7 : 58; 8 : 3; 9 : 1 ff.; I Cor. 15 : 9). When as a result of that persecution the Christian faith spread still further (p. 123), he followed in its wake, determined to destroy it root and branch. On the way to Damascus Jesus had manifested himself to Paul; and the experience proved to be a crucial turning-point for him (Acts 9 : 1 ff.; 22 : 6 ff.; 26 : 12 ff.). He heard a voice: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' and on his asking who the speaker was, he received the reply: 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.' In consequence of this encounter he became blind and remained so for several days. When his sight returned, he was a completely changed man. From that moment on he knew that he had met with the Risen Lord, that his life belonged to him and that he was called as an apostle to spread abroad the very gospel he had intended to destroy.

After his conversion he at once began to preach that Jesus was the Messiah. In the account of his life which he gives in Galatians 1-2 Paul tells us that he first of all spent a few years in Arabia. Eventually he went to Jerusalem; but there people were suspicious of this notorious persecutor and thought that he was probably a spy. However, a much respected member of the church (Acts 4 : 36), Barnabas, managed to introduce Paul into the community. Paul's bold preaching of Christ brought

him into conflict with the Jews; and it became advisable for him to flee. For ten years or so he stayed in the neighbourhood of Tarsus, his native town, though what he did during that time we do not know.

It was again Barnabas who eventually made contact with him. Together the two men went to Antioch, the capital of Syria (p. 30). After a journey to Jerusalem which they undertook together on a relief mission from Antioch (Acts 11 : 30), there was a gathering at which they received an unexpected assignment. It is referred to by Luke in these words: 'The Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' (Acts 13 : 2). That divine initiative marked the beginning of Paul's tremendous journeys, which were to be of such significance for history and for the world.

Taking Mark (see p. 59) with them, Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus, which was Barnabas's home territory. There they imparted the gospel to Sergius Paulus, the governor, a man deeply interested in things spiritual and in their various manifestations and trends. From Cyprus they crossed over to the mainland of Asia Minor. In Perga Mark backed out—an action which had a most unhappy after-effect on relations between the two apostles. At Pisidian Antioch Paul preached in a synagogue. His sermon, reiterated in Acts 13 : 16 ff., typifies the kind of thing that was said on such occasions: the crucified and risen Christ is proclaimed as he who fulfils the promises given in the Old Testament and makes available to men the forgiveness of sins. Among the Jews and those gentiles whose interest had been engaged reactions to this were mixed: some were for, and some against. The Jews' hostility was taken by the apostles to indicate that they should turn their attention completely to the gentile inhabitants of the city; and there they found such a good hearing



that the Jews became more antagonistic than ever and sent them forcibly about their business. As so often in the story of the Acts, this instance of persecution served only to further the progress of the work. They came via Iconium to Lystra, where they healed a crippled man. This miracle led people to think that gods had come down to earth in human form; but when the apostles demurred at the adulation of these pagans, they quickly changed their tune. The Jews who had come after them in hot pursuit instigated a brawl during which Paul was stoned and carried off for dead. But most miraculously he recovered and was able to continue his journey. After having preached in Derbe, they set out again by the same route for Antioch, stopping here and there on the way in order to strengthen and encourage some of the young churches which were having a difficult time of it. Back once more at their starting-point in Antioch, they delivered a report on their experiences. This first missionary journey is described in Acts 13-14, which comprises an account of 'all that God had done with them'.

The apostles' contact with the gentiles, which had been made originally in Antioch itself, gave rise to a good deal of intense and often bitter argument; and throughout his life Paul felt the impact of this in various ways (see in particular the Letter to the Galatians). The fact is that certain Jewish Christians were maintaining that, of itself, faith in Christ was not enough. Gentiles must be circumcised and must subject themselves to the Law of Moses if they were to be included within the Covenant and were to become in the full sense children of God. Paul and Barnabas set their face against all conditions of that sort. The question really amounted to this: is Christ Jesus the sole and sufficient mediator between God and men, or does something still remain to be done, some obligation

remain to be fulfilled on man's side? In other words, the whole, unique significance of Jesus was at stake. It was decided to put the issue to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15); and after it had been carefully considered and debated, even men like Peter and James were convinced that the only thing requisite was faith in Christ. For Jews, who had been circumcised anyway, it was still necessary to observe the requirements of the Law—Paul himself conceded that—but these were not to be binding upon gentile Christians. The latter need only respect certain stipulations about abstaining from idolatry and fornication, so that nothing should stand in the way of their having proper fellowship with Jewish Christians. The decision was far-reaching in its implications; for it meant that the Christians were no longer a Jewish sect. It put the message of the salvation brought by Christ fully and freely within the reach of all. Furthermore Paul undertook to canvass the churches under his care for help on behalf of the sorely distressed community in Jerusalem.

When Paul and Barnabas had brought news of the decision back to Antioch, they stayed on in the city for some time to instruct the Christians there. Before long, however, Paul felt an urge to re-visit the churches established during his first missionary tour. But when it came to organizing the journey, he found himself at loggerheads with his old friend and companion, Barnabas, because the latter wanted to take his nephew Mark along with them, and Paul could not stomach that idea at all (p. 130). So this time they went their separate ways, Barnabas and Mark to Cyprus, Paul with a new travelling-companion, Silas, to Lystra and Iconium (Acts 15 : 35 ff.).

Early on in this second tour, at Lystra, Paul took into his party a certain Timothy, who was to be his trusted attendant and companion over many years and his helper

in propagating the gospel. Continuing on their way, they were able to strengthen the recently formed churches in the faith. But very soon they decided to try and reach areas so far unvisited. There was a route right across Asia Minor to the west coast; but when Paul made up his mind to go on into the country around Ephesus, he found that God was telling him not to do so and in fact was making it impracticable, although Paul does not say specifically how or why. A similar thing happened when he formed a plan to begin preaching in the northern parts of Asia Minor. The way which God intended Paul to follow was shown him in a dream in which he saw a Macedonian appealing to him to come across the sea. Thus Paul's tour carried him into the land of Greece, with all its tremendous cultural influence (Acts 16: 1 ff.); and so in that strange and surprising fashion the gospel made its entry into Europe.

The first town they visited in Macedonia was the Roman colony of Philippi, where the first people to be baptized by Paul were a wealthy lady and her household. Trouble was brewing, however; for Paul gave a slave-girl release from a 'spirit of divination' (i.e. of soothsaying); and her owners incurred a serious financial loss in consequence. The apostles were immediately flung into gaol, but were delivered miraculously (this time through the conversion of the gaoler). When Paul let it be known what gross injustice had been done him as a Roman citizen, the city magistrates became uneasy and with some show of ceremony begged the apostles to be on their way (Acts 16: 11 ff.). They went, leaving behind them, however, a Christian community to which Paul always thereafter felt a close attachment, as one can see from his Letter to the Philippians (see e.g., Philip. 4: 1, 10 ff.).

They resumed their journey and came to the great seaport of Thessalonica in northern Greece. There Paul began by

preaching in the synagogue; but though he once again encountered a certain amount of sympathetic interest, there was also further opposition. The Jews succeeded in whipping up a disturbance among the inhabitants and wanted to have the apostles convicted and sentenced in the popular assembly. The charge was 'that they are all acting against the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' In the Greek the word for 'king' and 'Cæsar' is the same—so this was a serious indictment of a political character (Acts 17 : 7). Still, Paul and Silas managed to escape to Beroea, where they were received by the Jews with open arms. Even so, they were not allowed to continue with their activities for very long without interruption. Indeed they were soon stopped altogether, because the Jews from Thessalonica created an impossible situation. The party then broke up. As Paul was the principal target for these attacks, it was arranged that he should leave for Athens and wait there for further news from Silas and Timothy. From that distance he sent a letter to the church in Thessalonica, confirming and strengthening them in the faith (see I Thess. 2 : 1 ff.).

During his stay in Athens—the city which had once played such a major role in the history of Greece—Paul was greatly struck by the idolatry of the place. The proverbially inquisitive Athenians were much intrigued by what he had to say. He made contact with the spokesmen of several influential schools of philosophy, including the Epicureans and the Stoics (see p. 34 f.), and was escorted to the Areopagus so that they could hear him expound his new doctrine. Paul began by referring to the inscription on an altar which he had seen during his wanderings through the town. It said: '(Dedicated) to the unknown God.' That unknown one he would now make known to them—known as God the Creator, who is not far away.

In his address to this pagan audience the apostle made use of a popular quotation from one of the Greek poets; but though the words may have sounded familiar enough, they turned out to be merely the preamble to yet another of Paul's appeals for conversion—for he pointed his listeners to the approaching judgment of the Christ whom God had raised from the dead. There was a good deal of bickering over Paul's allusions to the resurrection; and his preaching generally did not have very much success (Acts 17 : 15 ff.).

He pursued his journey to the great port of Corinth, where the volume of traffic between East and West brought with it a bustling concourse of humanity. Here again Paul began his task in the synagogue; but he met with so much opposition that he had to give that up pretty quickly. Then a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who because they were Jews had been expelled from Rome, came to his support. With these people Paul ever afterwards maintained the closest possible friendship. Something of the difficulty that Paul experienced in carrying on his work can also be inferred from a dream which he had, assuring him that he would come to no harm and that there would one day be a flourishing church in Corinth. About eighteen months later a new governor was appointed, in the person of Gallio, brother of the philosopher Seneca. Here the Jews saw a golden opportunity, as they supposed, to rid themselves of Paul; but Gallio declared the whole thing to be a purely domestic squabble among the Jews and refused to have anything to do with it (Acts 18 : 1 ff.). Paul, having toiled away there for a considerable time, tending and building up the church, eventually decided that he must make his way back to the East and report in Jerusalem and Antioch on his experiences (even if Acts 18 : 22 does not say this in so many words).

But even now he did not settle down in Antioch; for

he had plans for yet a third missionary journey. This time it took him right across Asia Minor to the capital city of Ephesus, where he worked for more than two years. Among those whom he met were some disciples of John the Baptist (see p. 67), whom he introduced to the full faith. Besides his preaching, his miraculous cures attracted a lot of attention and brought him into contact with magic and sorcery, which were widely practised at Ephesus. When it became evident that the name of Jesus was not just a spell or a formula to conjure with, quite a few gave up this form of idolatry. It was during this period that Paul was in correspondence with the church at Corinth, where a number of sharp divisions had occurred and seeds of distrust had been sown regarding his status as an apostle. A serious conflict developed with the devotees of the civic goddess, Artemis, whose temple was a popular centre of pilgrimage. There was an attempt on Paul's life, which he survived only by the skin of his teeth (Acts 19 : 1 ff.). It seems probable that he was also in prison for a spell and under some threat to his personal safety (see I Cor. 15 : 32; II Cor. 1 : 8-9). The 'Letters from Prison', as they are called—Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon and Philippians—very likely belong to this period, although another school of thought maintains that they derive from a later time when Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

Once again he crossed the Aegean and travelled through Macedonia and Greece to make contact with the churches in that area. It was then that he wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome, giving them what was perhaps his most important exposition of the cardinal points of the message he sought to proclaim. He wanted to make people understand what his doctrine was; for he had come to the conclusion that his task in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea area was finished. He was longing to see Rome

and to go on from there into Spain (Rom. 15 : 23 ff.). But before he could act on this plan he must return once more to Jerusalem to hand over what he had already collected on behalf of the church there (I Cor. 16 : 1 ff.; II Cor. 8-9). Because he wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, he set off for Palestine with all speed along the coast of Asia Minor (Acts 20 : 1 ff.; a celebrated passage is his farewell speech to the elders from Ephesus: Acts 20 : 18 ff.). *En route* the apostle received the news that imprisonment awaited him in Jerusalem; but he went on all the same, ready to die, if need be, for the name of Christ (Acts 21 : 10 ff.).

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to see James (see p. 126), who advised him to heed certain provisions of the Jewish Law because people felt so strongly about them; and to this Paul agreed. But whilst he was in the temple he got into serious trouble. Some Jews from Asia Minor had seen Paul in the city with a gentile Christian and alleged that he had brought this uncircumcised person into the temple—an offence punishable by death. An attempt was made to kill the apostle; and he only came out of it alive because the Roman guard on Castle Antonia intervened. He was arrested; and with that began the long years of his imprisonment. In Jerusalem his life was in danger; so he was sent to the governor Felix in Cæsarea. On various occasions Paul was obliged—was indeed anxious—to make a case for himself before the Jews; but now, so as to obviate the danger of falling into the hands of the Jewish leaders, he appealed to the highest authority, to the emperor himself. Even when Festus became the new governor, Paul remained under arrest. In Jesus's own words, he was 'a witness before kings and governors' (cf. Acts 9 : 15; the story of these years is told in Acts 21 : 27 ff.—Acts 26). The apostle was forced to make the journey to Rome in

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

circumstances quite different from those he had originally envisaged. He arrived there, still in captivity, only after a long and adventurous voyage (Acts 27-28).

In Rome he received a hearty welcome from some of the Christians; but his encounter with members of the Jewish faction led to another sharp clash. Again he warns them that if the Jews reject salvation, it will be given to the gentiles. The narrative in Acts says that for two years Paul continued to preach in his private apartment, without any interference; and then, just at that point, it suddenly breaks off. What happened to him after that is not at all clear. Some maintain that at the end of two years he was set free, completed his journey to Spain and even revisited the East (in that case, his letters to Timothy and Titus would date from this period); whilst according to tradition, he was put to death (i.e., was beheaded—being a Roman citizen) at Rome in A.D. 64. We cannot be certain about any of this; but whatever the facts may be, as Paul sees death approaching and looks back on the course of his life, he can say: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day . . .' (II Tim. 4: 7-8). He knew that his life, spent in his Lord's service, was safe in his Lord's hands.

### B. PREACHING

Paul's great achievement, as described in the preceding section, fell within a period between A.D. 46 and 62; but opinion differs as to the precise dating of particular events.

One cannot fail to be deeply impressed by the sheer intensity of the effort involved. In II Cor. 11: 23 ff. Paul himself lists some of the hazards to which he was exposed



in the course of his travels. He had given up a splendid career within Judaism in order to proclaim Christ his Lord (Philip. 3 : 5 ff.); and this had brought many indignities in its train.

No portrait of Paul has survived. In the later 'Acts of Paul' there is a not very imposing description of him as short, crooked and bald. II Corinthians 10 : 10 gives some idea of the impression he made: 'For they say, his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.' It was his ambition not to play the orator or make people spellbound at his eloquence but to provide a channel for the power of God to flow through (I Cor. 2). He was impeded by what he calls a 'thorn in the flesh' (II Cor. 12 : 7 ff.), presumably some disease or other. As well as preaching, he earned a living as a tentmaker, so that he should not have to depend on the generosity of other people (Acts 18 : 3; 20 : 34; I Cor. 4 : 12).

It is noticeable that Paul chose to work for the most part in large cities, from which the influence of his preaching could spread out into the surrounding countryside. We know from Acts that he invariably started in the synagogue, because Christ was the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Yet in so doing he never lost sight of his mission to the gentiles; for the gospel was the 'power of God for salvation' to both Jew and Greek (Rom. 1 : 16). Once he had formed a community of believers he would stay on to instruct it; and he would continue to build it up if he possibly could, by returning to visit it again and again. He looked upon himself as having a father's responsibility towards his churches and kept in continuous touch by correspondence and by sending his friends to help them (I Cor. 4 : 15). His concern for them was a 'daily pressure' (II Cor. 11 : 28). They would put their particular problems

to him and Paul would respond with detailed directions and advice. Such letters as I Corinthians and Philippians illustrate this very well. Characteristic too is his plea to Philemon for a runaway slave. His letters enable the apostle to guide, admonish and inspire his churches from afar. He is always dealing with the practical issues involved in living the life of faith; and this means that everything is set in the light of Christ. See, for instance, how he advocates a collection in II Corinthians 8-9. He usually starts with a section expounding various matters of belief and then in the latter part goes on to give his directions for the practical conduct of life.

Paul used a variety of terms with which to describe his calling: apostle, servant, 'slave of Jesus Christ'; but most profound of all, perhaps, is the passage in II Cor. 5 : 20: 'So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.' Whatever the difficulties encountered, he had to go through with his task; for 'necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (I Cor. 9 : 16). His message came up against the unbelief of Jew and Greek (I Cor. 1 : 22, 23), which meant that he was not only repulsed but sometimes involved in physical violence. Even the Christian communities gave him his share of setbacks and disappointments. There were those who undermined his authority (II Cor. 10 ff.) or failed to live as they should; and some of his followers, such as Demas, deserted him (II Tim. 4 : 10). Still he persevered; for 'knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men . . . for the love of Christ controls us . . .' (II Cor. 5 : 11-14). Because he was conscious of having received his commission from the Risen Christ, his life had prospect and purpose in it. What he wrote in I Corinthians 15 : 58 can be applied to himself: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast,

immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.' The same magnificent note of assurance is sounded by the compelling words of Romans 8 : 38 ff.: 'For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Through union with his victorious Lord in the Holy Spirit he was conscious again and again of being charged inwardly with fresh power: 'So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day' (II Cor. 4 : 16).

Paul was profoundly aware of the limits of his own strength and aware also of the great treasure that had been entrusted to him; cf. II Cor. 4 : 7: 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.' In II Cor. 12 he talks about a special revelation which had been vouchsafed to him and about the 'thorn in the flesh' with which he is encumbered. He adds that he has prayed three times for this burden to be removed; but that has not happened. 'But he said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (vv. 8-9). At verse 10 he expresses this remarkable experience with the words: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'

Throughout the course of his life he was distressed at the thought of his having at one time persecuted the church of God. He knew himself to be, for that reason, the least of all the apostles; but it also became clear to him how great God's forgiveness was (I Cor. 15 : 9; Philip. 3 : 6).

He was assisted in his work by various younger men, such as his friends Timothy, Titus, Silas and so forth.

They helped him in all sorts of ways: for instance, by carrying his messages and instructions to the different churches. This closeness of fellowship between Christian people meant a very great deal to Paul. Consider, for example, Philippians 2 : 1 ff.: 'So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy . . . complete my joy by being of the same mind.' Paul caps this appeal in the panegyric of Philippians 2 : 5-11 by pointing to the example of Christ.

If one asks what was for Paul the very pivot and centre of his existence, the answer may be found in Galatians 2 : 20: 'It is . . . Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' He himself does not stand at the centre, nor does he seek any honour for himself; 'for what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord' (II Cor. 4 : 5). That crucial encounter with the risen Lord near Damascus turned him into an apostle (I Cor. 9 : 1; 15 : 8) and transformed his life. For him the gospel is not a nexus of pious words and phrases about God and religion, but a living reality: 'It is the power (*dunamis*) of God for salvation' (Rom. 1 : 16). The kingdom of God consists not in words but in power. Therefore he can say time and again that he is 'in Christ'; for that same Jesus who gave himself in love and is risen from the dead determines all his thinking, his willing, his feeling and his conduct. To put it in another way: he has no longer 'a righteousness of his own', but 'that which is through faith'; that is, he does not attempt to achieve and maintain for himself a proper relationship to God; but firmly trusting in his Lord, he knows that that relationship is in good order (Philip. 3 : 7 ff.).

Because he has seen in Jesus Christ the decisive action

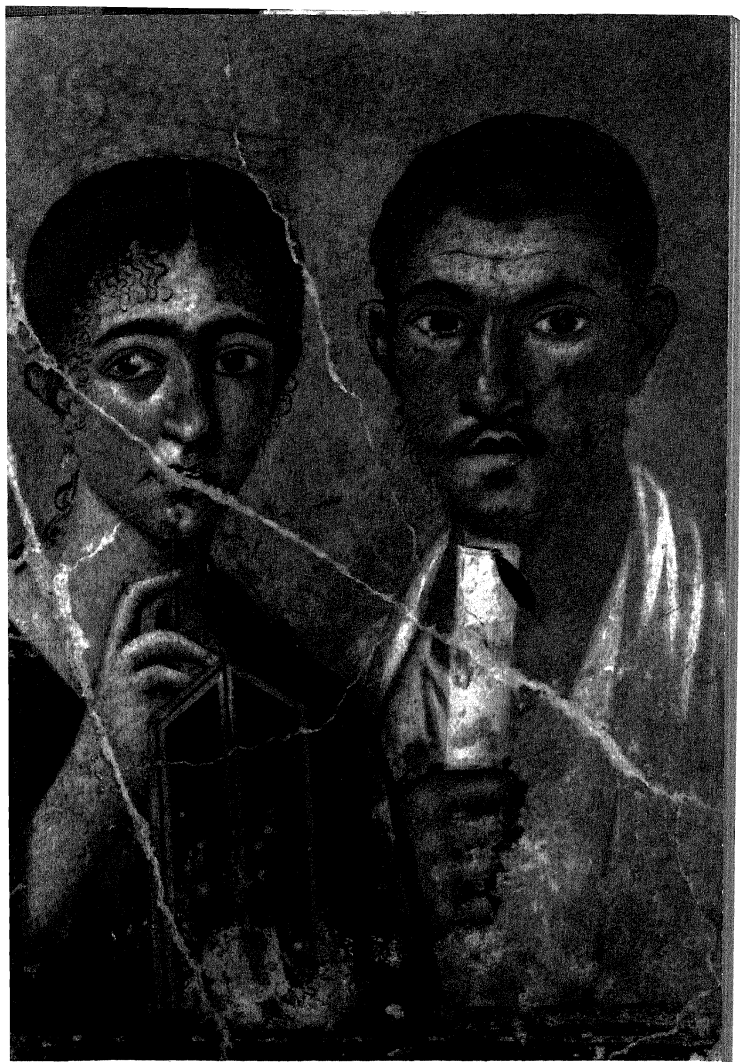
of God in the world, the mystery of God's redemptive plan for this world has been made clear to him (Eph. 3 : 1 ff.). Riches without end or limit are his portion; and in a transport of adoring wonder he exclaims: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!' (Rom. 11 : 33). He has learned to read the Holy Scripture of the Jews, the Old Testament, anew in the light of Christ—not as a book of commands which no man can fulfil, but as the book of the promises of God. In Christ a veil is taken away from his eyes (II Cor. 3) and he now has a clear vision of the radiant and imperishable glory of the New Covenant (see p. 13). Indeed the patriarch Abraham himself, in whom the Jews took such pride, attained true fellowship with God not through his 'works' but through faith (Rom. 4). That 'new covenant' which God had promised has been realized in Christ.

In his use of the Old Testament Paul employs the allegorical method (Gal. 4 : 21 ff.; Hagar and Sarah), contending that what was written there has reference to Christians (I Cor. 10 : 6-11). In so doing, he was conforming to the common practice of the time (p. 36). Furthermore, he uses to illustrate his message all kinds of pictorial images drawn from the contemporary world: for example, the games as a representation of life itself (I Cor. 9 : 24 ff.), the 'ransoming' of a slave (I Cor. 6 : 20), adoption (i.e. of a child; Rom. 8 : 16). Very occasionally he quotes a word or a phrase from a Greek author (I Cor. 15 : 33; Tit. 1 : 12); but these quotations were probably current as proverbs at that period. In any case they are strikingly few, compared with the great number of citations from the Old Testament. Now and again—as in I Cor. 2 : 9 and Eph. 5 : 14—Paul quotes something which is not in the Old Testament. These sayings he has almost certainly

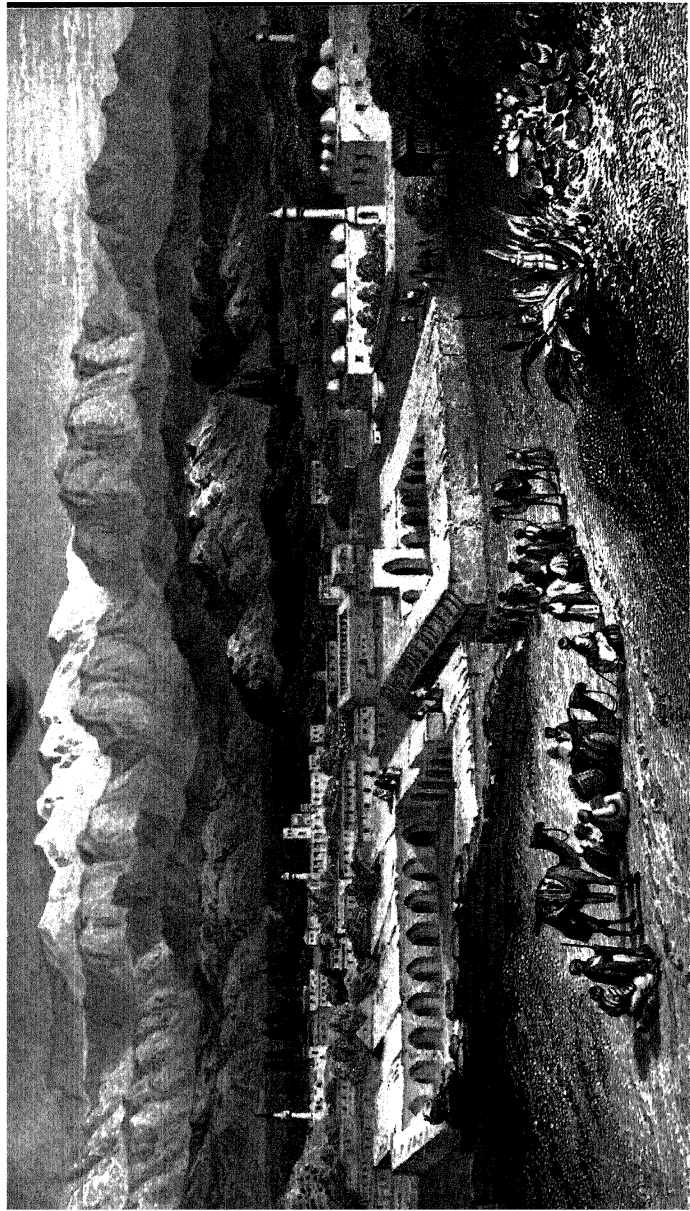
borrowed from late Jewish writings no longer extant.

For Paul God was no empty word or riddle, but the Holy One whom the Scripture had taught him to know as Creator of the world. The apostle saw how the gentiles within that world flouted God with their idolatry and immoral living (Rom. 1 : 18 ff.; I Cor. 12 : 2), and were for that reason 'without hope and without God in the world' (Eph. 2 : 12), excluded from the covenant with God. Yet such a state of affairs is no part of God's design. Whether overtly or not, a condition of enmity exists between God and men, because they contravene God's will; and that is something which he does not allow to go unpunished. The wrath of God descends upon the heathen for their disobedience (Rom. 1 : 18). The Jews indeed had a knowledge of God, and greatly prided themselves upon it (Rom. 2), supposing that they could meet God's requirements by their own efforts. But personal experience had taught Paul that a human being can never fulfil the Law of God to perfection. The tendency to move in another direction is always present (Rom. 7).

Now that is just where Jesus Christ comes in; for he is the One whom God himself has sent into the world to bring the enmity to an end (Rom. 5). 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (II Cor. 5 : 19), and in this same Christ has poured out his love upon men (see Tit. 3 : 4-5). Here we see the meaning of divine 'grace', as something that men can neither expect nor deserve. In the terrible cross, which is a 'scandal' to the Jews and to the Greeks 'foolishness', God reveals the depths of his love (I Cor. 1 : 21, 22); and in the resurrection of Christ he has displayed (I Cor. 15; II Tim. 1 : 10) his victorious power over death itself, the last enemy of mankind and the 'wages of sin' (Rom. 6 : 23). Jesus Christ, because he is the one who makes men free from sin and gives them



Portrait of a man and his wife, from a wall-painting at Pompeii



Tarsus with the Tarsus Mountains behind



peace with God (Rom. 5 : 1), is the 'Lord' (*Kurios*) over all life, who will eventually come to pass judgment on all the actions of men (II Cor. 5 : 10). Then those who are united with him through faith will share in the glory of God; and God will be all in all (I Cor. 15 : 26 ff.; I Thess. 4 : 13 ff.).

Although as yet invisible to ordinary sight, all this is nevertheless visible to the eye of faith—of that faith which surrenders itself to Christ and relies utterly upon him. For his part, God establishes this bond of communion through the peculiar gift of his Holy Spirit which, though not of itself human, is yet freely proffered to men. It is a pledge, an 'earnest' (Eph. 1 : 13 f.) which enables us to say to God: 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8 : 15). It is this too which makes us free and ensures our adoption as children of God. For 'what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit' (I Cor. 2 : 9). Paul saw this at work in various forms of mutual help and guidance and revelatory functions within the church (I Cor. 12-14), and in everything that brings with it a transformation of life. For life 'according to the flesh', life at the natural level, leads nowhere; but the Spirit makes of it a new kind of life which is turned towards God (Rom. 8 : 1 ff.).

So Paul is always speaking of the new life in practical terms and giving concrete directions about how to live it. The Christian is not to continue in the 'former things'—i.e. is not to carry on with the old life (I Cor. 6 : 9 ff.)—but rather conduct himself as a person 'worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Philip. 1 : 27). Paul gives various injunctions about day-to-day life in the home and explains how parents, children and slaves ought to behave towards one another (Eph. 5-6; Col. 3-4). A lot of it may seem pretty obvious

to us; but it was far from being so in the ancient world. All the more impressive, therefore, is Paul's emphasis on centering everything firmly in Christ. He insists, for instance, that people are to forgive as Christ has forgiven; that a master has to realize that he may not behave like a tyrant toward his slaves or treat them in an arbitrary fashion, since he has a Master of his own. One should behave duly and properly towards the government (Rom. 13 : 1) and pray for it (I Tim. 2 : 1 ff.), even though it is not Christian. Paul wants to see the natural order maintained; for God is 'not a God of confusion but of peace' (I Cor. 14 : 33). He also exhorts Christians to take thought for 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, whatever is excellent and worthy of praise', including the things which Paul himself has taught (Philip. 4 : 8-9). He does not counsel slaves to seek their freedom by resorting to force or by running away (I Cor. 7 : 20 ff.); for even on an issue like this he is opposed to confusion and disorder. The ancient world, after all, did rest on that particular social system (see p. 31); and it was a revolution from within that Paul wanted to see, a complete change of heart and mind. One must admit that what he said on this question was later twisted and misapplied—as though he had wanted to maintain the *status quo* in every respect. Of course, he wanted nothing of the kind; for it was precisely 'the new life' that he was after! As he came to learn from Christ's sacrifice what love really means, it became for him the epitome of Christian living. What an incomparably splendid eulogy on this theme he has given us in I Corinthians 13! This love was a quality which he has himself shown in his dealings with men and women. If, for example, there are those in Corinth who are afraid to eat certain kinds of meat because they have been polluted

by idolatry, he abstains too, so as not to try the faith of these 'weak' brethren. The one necessary thing is to act in all circumstances as a person with faith in Christ; 'for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (Rom. 14 : 23).

This applies, for instance, to the use of one's body, which Paul calls a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (I Cor. 6 : 19); but it holds good in a wider connection too. As for rules and regulations, whether negative or positive, Paul knew himself to have been set free by Christ from them all; and in this respect he left plenty of scope for personal choice: 'let every one be fully convinced in his own mind'; for we must remember that 'we are the Lord's' (most relevant here is the whole argument of Romans 14-15). It meant that Paul was taking up an entirely new position in regard to Judaism, which regulated everything as strictly as possible. Born a Jew, he always felt an intense affinity with his own people (Rom. 9 : 1 ff.), even if their rejection of the Messiah perplexed him very much. But he had seen how, in Christ, salvation had come to the gentiles also, and how the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and gentile had been broken down. In this too Christ was 'our peace' (Eph. 2-3). The love of Christ calls for love between men; for love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13 : 10). In one way or another Paul appeals to his readers to be on the alert, to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light: 'Put on,' he says, 'the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 13 : 12 ff.). In Ephesians 6 : 10 ff. he describes in arresting detail the armour in which men must stand if they are to engage in the warfare of the spirit.

Paul's letters speak the more powerfully as they are read in relation to their time. Here we have been able to draw out of their abundant richness only a few of the principal features—yet enough to show that Paul concerns himself with the whole life of man, that he does not withdraw from

the world but sets his own life and the lives of those with whom he has to deal wholly in the light of Christ. Through Christ all things have become new (II Cor. 5 : 17). Our intercourse with God and men is transformed, because it is now predominantly motivated by peace and love. No one can really encounter Paul without discovering, as a matter of personal experience, the revolutionizing and re-forming power of his message.

In his own time and for most of his contemporaries Paul was no very remarkable figure. He appeared to be little more than an itinerant Jewish preacher who went about asseverating that the Messiah had come. Yet more than any other single person he demonstrated that the gospel is a power of God, and that to have faith in Christ is a liberating experience and a source of joy. His life bears out what, according to Acts 9 : 15, was said by the Lord himself, when he called Paul 'a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name'.

### 3. *Other apostolic writings*

In addition to the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's own letters there are preserved in the New Testament a number of documents which give us some idea of how others besides Paul preached the gospel message. Most of these writings are likewise epistolary in character; and seven of them are grouped together as the 'catholic' or 'general' epistles. They are so called because, unlike Paul's, they are not addressed to particular communities or individuals (James; Peter I & II; John I, II & III; and Jude). The last book in the Bible, the Revelation of John, is different again, and has a peculiar character of its own (see p. 158 ff.).

As regards their form the New Testament letters differ from the sort we write nowadays. You can see that, as in

the case of Paul's epistles, they invariably start with a preamble or introductory section giving the name of the writer, the designation of those to whom the letter is addressed and a benediction, thus: (so-and-so) to (so-and-so) at (such and such a place) . . . grace and peace. In some instances this type of formula is greatly elaborated (see e.g. in Romans). The preamble accords with normal epistolary usage in ancient times, even when instead of the typical Christian benediction the phrase is simply: 'To the reader(s) . . . greeting' (see Acts 23 : 26). Then—often if not always—comes some giving of thanks. After the main contents of the letter have been set down there follows a list of greetings or 'salutations'; and then, in place of the pagan 'fare you well', a further benediction: 'Grace (be) with you all' (a good, detailed example is II Cor. 13 : 13).

## A. HEBREWS

It would appear from the greetings at the end of chapter 13 that this is a letter; but as the preamble is missing, we do not know who was writing to whom. The ancient world was also ignorant of these details. Among others, the name of Barnabas has been cited in this connection. In later times the letter was usually ascribed to Paul; but even in the 16th century Calvin saw that this must be wrong. The style, the argument and the general run of ideas in Hebrews set it quite apart from the Pauline letters. What we have here is a document deriving from the second generation of Christians (Heb. 2 : 3, 4).

It appears at first sight to be a rather strange document; and it makes that impression because of the intense interest it displays in various provisions of the Old Testament Law for regulating the rites of public worship. Those rites, it says, presented 'shadows' of subsequent 'real events'

(Heb. 8 : 5). It is therefore an allegorizing method of exegesis that is applied (p. 36). Once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, the earthly high priest of the Jews was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of animals in order to make propitiation for sins. The author of Hebrews discovers a parallel between this high-priestly figure and the Lord Jesus, who by his death on the cross as a lamb of sacrifice has shed his blood once for all, and with that blood has passed into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4 : 14 ff.). A further parallel is drawn (in ch. 3-4 : 13) between Jesus and Moses. Just as Moses brought the Jewish people through the wilderness to the threshold of the promised land on earth, so Jesus brings men to the promised land of heaven. A significant point here is that, according to the Old Testament record, Moses did not enter the promised land himself—it was Joshua who eventually led the people in; and the name 'Joshua' appears in the Septuagint as 'Jesus'. In chapter 7 Jesus is compared with Melchizedek (a king of Jerusalem mentioned in Genesis 14 : 18 ff.), because Jesus has fulfilled Psalm 110. In this way the author highlights the tremendous significance of Jesus, whose crucial task has been to open the way to God. For Jesus is the very Son of God, and therefore surpasses Moses and the high priest and all such predecessors. The opening passage of 'Hebrews' makes this clear straight away: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' (Heb. 1 : 1). The work of Christ gives men assurance and boldness in their approach to God: 'Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace' (Heb. 4 : 16). Yet because Christ signified God's final and ultimate intervention, the invitation is also a warning.

The people for whom this is written have in point of

fact been wavering in their faith. They need to be exhorted: 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering' (Heb. 10 : 23). There is a likelihood that they may slacken off, probably under the threat of persecution (Heb. 12 : 3); and so the author reminds them of the 'springtime' of their faith: 'But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one' (Heb. 10 : 32 ff.). This letter, then, is a stirring call to its readers not to be disloyal (ch. 2-3) or to give way to despair; for the great High Priest was himself human and is able to 'sympathize with our weaknesses' (Heb. 4 : 14 ff.). The gladness and the majesty of faith serve as a reminder of the awful gravity of judgment to come: 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. 10 : 31). Thus the Old Testament is called in aid and the work of Christ is made the basis of a solemn exhortation to the reader, holding out to him the prospect of glory and summoning him to increase and fortify his faith.

A celebrated passage in this letter is the 'gallery of the heroic faithful' in chapter 11. Various men of God in the Old Testament—especially Abraham and Moses—are briefly portrayed. Their lives demonstrated that they had complete trust in the promises of God, even though the final outcome was hidden from their sight; for 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction (or "title to ownership", "mortgage") of things not seen' (Heb. 11 : 1). The author sums up his message and his argument in Hebrews 12 : 1 ff.: 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by

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so great a crowd of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking (only) to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.'

### B. JAMES

This document is quite different again in character from both Hebrews and the letters of Paul. It says nothing about the significance of Jesus Christ and his work—the name of Jesus is only twice mentioned (Jas. 1:1; 2:1). It comprises a collection of sayings—with sometimes only a very loose thread of connection between them—intended to provide rules for right living; and in this respect it reminds one of the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament or of Ecclesiasticus (the Book of Jesus Sirach) in the Apocrypha. It is true that this document has a preamble of the customary type; but its terms of address are so general that one might call it a manifesto rather than a letter.

It is meant for 'the twelve tribes in the dispersion'—this being a collective term for the Jews living outside of Palestine (see p. 48). However, the Jews of that time generally considered that the dispersion comprised ten tribes. The word is used here, presumably, in a Christian context: i.e. to signify the people of God, who live as 'strangers' on the earth and not in their 'heavenly country' (cf. Philip. 3:20). The author is a man called James. This is usually taken to mean James, the brother of Jesus



(see p. 126). It seems remarkable that a man like him, so punctilious in his observance of the Jewish Law, should make not so much as a single reference to it.

The work is really an assemblage of practical advice and exhortation. The author warns his readers against regarding God as the source of temptations and against an attitude of scepticism (Jas. 1 : 2 ff.). It is not enough to listen to the Word of God. It must then be translated into action (Jas. 1 : 19 ff.); for faith without works is a dead faith (Jas. 2 : 14 ff.). It seems that in the circles which James had his eye on there was a good deal of class distinction and that the well-to-do were having things pretty much their own way. With a backward glance at the Old Testament he says that God is no 'respector of persons': that is to say, God looks not upon outward things but on the inward reality, and is an impartial Judge. So too within the Christian community rich people are not to be treated with undue deference and the poor with contempt. There is a lively picture of that kind of thing in James 2 : 2 ff. The rich are extortionate (Jas. 5 : 1 ff.); and James gives them a solemn warning. Those who from a worldly standpoint are poor God destines to be rich in faith. James then turns to the grave danger which lurks in sinful talk, in blasphemy and backbiting (Jas. 3 : 1 ff.). He censures inordinate passion and attachment to this world, because these things distract men from God. 'Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you' (Jas. 4 : 10). One must live patiently in this world, even in the midst of suffering, like the Old Testament figure of Job; for 'the coming of the Lord is at hand', that is, the day when God shall judge in righteousness (Jas. 5 : 7 ff.).

The author has been putting into practice on his own account what in his final exhortation he urges upon others: 'If any one among you wanders from the truth and some

one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.'

Even if circumstances have changed since James's day, what he says is pertinent still, because the heart of man has not changed.

## C. PETER

As regards the course of this apostle's life the main points have been noted already on pp. 56 f., 124. He wrote a letter to people living in Asia Minor—not indeed to any particular church or churches, but to those who were there as 'witnesses of the dispersion' (cf. p. 48 f.). Probably he had in mind the 'Godfearers', as they were called (see p. 50). These people, if they did not submit to the full rigours of the Law, were not regarded by the Jews as participating in the Covenant with God or as 'heirs of salvation'. Peter, whose work was carried on principally among the Jews (Gal. 2 : 9), wants to assure people of this sort—Cornelius, for example (Acts 10)—that it is indeed open to them to be part of God's people (I Pet. 2 : 9), because through his sacrifice Jesus Christ has made this privilege freely available to them (I Pet. 1 : 18, 19). Peter states clearly enough in I Peter 5 : 12 the purpose he has in writing his letter: 'I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.'

The circumstances in which his readers find themselves are far from propitious; so Peter gets straight to the point by declaring, in chapter 1, that their faith may well be exposed to various trials. The word 'suffering' comes in over and over again here. It is not really surprising that the name of Christ was a principal source of mockery and

reproach (I Pet. 4 : 14); for we have to realize that, as individuals, these people represented a way of life totally different from everything around them. Time was when they too had lived just like the pagans, licentiously, in drunkenness and in idolatry (I Pet. 4 : 3). Now that they were Christians and had come to the light, they had of course given all this up; but for that very reason they were regarded as kill-joys. We know from various reports emanating from a later period that the Christians were accused of all sorts of dark practices, because they would have nothing to do with a whole range of customs and ceremonies generally taken for granted in the ancient world. They could not, for example, accept any official position or attend public ceremonies, because that would have meant offering sacrifices to pagan gods. Peter enjoins his readers not to upset themselves over such defamatory attacks so long as they have a good conscience before God and remain innocent of all wrongdoing: 'But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God' (I Pet. 4 : 15, 16). They have become citizens of another realm, of the kingdom of God, and their life here on earth is really lived in exile (I Pet. 1 : 17; 2 : 11). Peter stresses the importance of leading a good life in accordance with God's will (I Pet. 1 : 17; 2 : 12; 3 : 8 ff.), and sums it all up under one guiding principle: that in everything they do Christians must be holy (I Pet. 1 : 15). 'All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil' (I Pet. 3 : 8).

It is part of the Christian's calling to be ready at all times to give an account of his faith (I Pet. 3 : 15); and his manner of life should be marked, not by a fine outward show of

things but by interior strength (I Pet. 3 : 4). Peter underlines in particular the need to obey the government; and he has a special word for slaves and women (I Pet. 2 : 23 ff.). By acting thus Christians will 'declare the wonderful deeds (literally, 'virtues') of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (I Pet. 2 : 9). Christians, he says, are the true people of God and—in the words of Exodus 19 : 6—'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own (special) people' (I Pet. 2 : 9).

Despite the strains and stresses of life the whole letter breathes a spirit of joy. Everything is carried on a tide of confidence and hope. We may not have seen Christ, yet we are united with him by faith: 'You rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls' (I Pet. 1 : 8, 9). The same thought is magnificently expressed in the jubilant apostrophe: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (I Pet. 1 : 3).

What this letter conveys more than anything else is a powerful sense of what it really means to have faith in Christ. Such faith breeds assurance and joy. From it flow a new sense of purpose and a new life.

#### D. JUDE

The brief Epistle of Jude warns its readers against those who pervert the truth and under a cloak of Christianity manipulate the faith in their own interest and for their own ends. Notice that the author, who was apparently one of Jesus's brothers, not only takes several of his illustrations from the Old Testament but in verses 9 and 14 cites a couple of Jewish apocalyptic writings (see p. 47 f.): namely,

the Assumption of Moses and (the Ethiopic Book of) Enoch.

The general argument of this letter is repeated, with certain modifications, in II Peter, which is chiefly concerned to rebuke those who sneer at the idea of the Lord's return and say it is a sheer waste of time to look for anything of that sort. Some people have been watching out for it; but so far nothing has happened. The author reminds us that God does not measure time by the same standards as men do: 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (II Pet. 3 : 8). God is patient, 'not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.' The author summons men to holy living and utters powerful words of hope: 'But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (II Pet. 3 : 13). No one is to make light of the prophetic word (II Pet. 1 : 19 ff.). At a time when expectancy was flagging among Christian people this letter speaks in the strongest terms of the firmness of God's promises which men may treat with scorn, but which they cannot frustrate or nullify.

#### E. JOHN

There are three Letters of John (for him, see pp. 61 f., 127), the second and third being relatively short. They argue that the best way to deal with people who teach false doctrines and do not regulate themselves by the doctrine of Christ is to keep away from them. The theme of both letters is that love consists in living according to the commandments of Christ; for 'he who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God' (III John v. 11). The First Letter of John takes as the main point of its argument the antithesis between God and 'the world',

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light and darkness, love and hate. The most profound themes of the New Testament are touched upon here. I John 1 : 5-7: 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie . . . but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.'

2 : 16, 17: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.'

3 : 1, 3: 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . . . And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.'

3 : 16, 18: 'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren . . . let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.'

4 : 14-19: 'And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world . . . God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him . . . There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear . . . We love, because he first loved us.'

5 : 4: 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.'

## F. REVELATION

The last book in the Bible is the 'Revelation of John'. The author, because he persisted in his Christian profession, was held prisoner on Patmos, a small island in the Aegean

Sea, close by the coast of Asia Minor (Rev. 1 : 9), where according to early Christian tradition he wrote his book in the year A.D. 95. He had an ecstatic vision of Christ in majesty, ordering him to write down 'what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter' (Rev. 1 : 19).

It has to be admitted that on first reading, the Revelation is wholly enigmatic. The earlier part consists of seven letters to churches in Asia Minor, warning the Christians there of various dangers that threaten and exhorting them to stand firm, strengthened by the victorious power of Christ (ch. 2-3). Then John describes the celestial palace with the glory of God and the Lamb, who was slain and was found worthy to unlock the book of world history (Rev. ch. 4-5). The progressive stages of God's judgment, to be carried out on a faithless and defecting world, are divulged in a succession of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven 'vials' (bowls).

Seven seals: the term 'seals' here refers to the 'book' or scroll which was fastened with seven seals. As the book is unrolled, the next seal is broken and a fresh section exposed to view (cf. Rev. 5 : 1; ch. 6-8). The seven trumpets are those sounded by the angels to herald the 'day of wrath' (Rev. 8 : 2). The seven vials are 'full of the wrath of God' (Rev. 15 : 7).

In chapter 13 there appears a beast with ten horns and seven heads. This creature is empowered by the infernal might of the dragon to compel the world to accept his blasphemies and participate in them. It symbolizes the Roman empire, here presented as God's adversary, bracing itself for the final struggle either to entice God's servants away from him or to annihilate them. But Revelation shows that it is godless Rome that will be destroyed by Christ; and it goes on to describe how, after the final judgment, the new Jerusalem will descend out of heaven

in all its radiance. 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them . . . for the former things have passed away. And he who sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new' (Rev. 21 : 3-5).

The terrifying descriptions of how God will judge those who set themselves up against him are interrupted from time to time as the scene changes suddenly and we have a glimpse of heaven. Then songs of adoring praise to God sound from the lips of creatures representing the whole creation—hymns of exaltation before God and Christ, the Lamb: 'Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages (or nations)! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?' (Rev. 15 : 3, 4; cf. also in ch. 4-5 : 19).

Revelation is an artfully constructed book in which the sacred numbers 3, 7 and 12 play a prominent role. In style and mode of expression it echoes faithfully the language of the Old Testament prophets and of Jewish apocalypses (see p. 47 f.). The scenes described in it are often perplexing; but against that background they at once become clear. John saw the might of the Antichrist embodied in that Roman empire whose Cæsars arrogated to themselves the honours due to a divine being (see p. 38). In his book he depicts both the judgment of God upon a sinful world and the eventual triumph of his kingdom. Although events in this world seem to take a very wayward course, God's cause prevails; and the end is the radiant glory of communion with him.

John's purpose is to hearten and inspire his readers in the hour of distress and persecution: 'Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world . . . I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no



one may seize your crown' (Rev. 3 : 10, 11). It is a call to steadfastness, because notwithstanding the fury of the Evil One Christ triumphs; and those who in spite of everything remain true to him will share in his glory. This is not a book written to titillate or to gratify the curiosity of men anxious to tear aside the veil from the future. It is no book of riddles, although often in the past it has been treated as one. It does indeed draw veils aside and open up a vista of God's actions and his ways; for it proclaims the kingdom of God, which is here and now and yet is still to come in its fulness, bringing with it the overthrow of all that is against him. So the very last thing we have in the Bible is the vision and prospect of God's glorious reign; and so the call goes out: 'Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life' (Rev. 2 : 10).

Across the centuries the Revelation of John gives voice to that assurance. It sheds courage within the human heart and leads us to adore God and the Lamb, who is the Redeemer of men out of every nation.

## V. *The Results of Christ's Work*

### 1. *The church in the world*

What then was the net result of the work of Peter, Paul, John and all the anonymous Christians of the first generation who took forth with them the message of God's action in Jesus Christ? There are no surveys or statistics to enlighten us; and no history of the church containing a full account of this has come down to us from the ancient world. Over matters such as these a great deal of uncertainty must remain. Even the 'father of church history', Eusebius (c. A.D. 325), is unable to give us much completely reliable intelligence about those early generations. There are, of course, fragments of chance information in Acts and in the letters of the New Testament, to which one can turn; but even these incidental bits and pieces only came to be written down because a particular situation demanded it (for example, when a church ran into some problem or difficulty). A great deal even of this casual information has been lost; and in the case of countries like Egypt and Italy the material evidence is entirely lacking. Admittedly, the documents which have survived enable us to know what somebody like Paul, for instance, was thinking; but that is not to say that everybody took kindly to the same idea. We have seen already that there were sharp and profound differences of opinion regarding the admission of gentiles to the Christian community (p. 131); and later on we shall have to consider another similar case of disagree-

ment (p. 176). Yet though we would be glad to possess more information, we do after all get a pretty clear picture of events; and taking it all in all, we know more about the early growth of Christianity than we do about any other religion at that period.

If we now take a careful look at how things stood between A.D. 60 and 90, we find that there were groups of Christians in quite a number of places. From the tiny and dispirited band of disciples which was all that had been left after the crucifixion of the Master there had already sprung a world-wide movement. The stimulus, the momentum, had come from their faith in the resurrection of the Lord. His words were their marching orders. Even such a repressive campaign as is described in Acts 8 : 1 ff.; 11 : 19 ff. not only failed to wipe out the nucleus of disciples but actually helped to enlarge it and spread it further afield. In the face of opposition and despite all reverses the message about Jesus Christ prospers, making it possible to speak of a 'brotherhood throughout the world' (I Pet. 5 : 9). Take a look at the list of countries in I Peter 1 : 1 and then tot up the place-names mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, and you get a pretty sizeable number of localities. They lay more especially in the eastern part of the Roman empire, or to be precise, in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. The Christians were to be found in the cities rather than in the country districts; and their communities must have varied quite a bit in size and character of membership. One can see from Paul's letters that the problems of one place were not necessarily those of another. The church in a port like Corinth was a different proposition from the church in a small inland town, say, in Colossae. But the message is world-embracing and the world is its goal—such is the nature of the assignment in Acts 1 : 8: 'to the end of the earth.' That is also how the visionary

author of the Revelation sees it, when he speaks of 'a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation' (Rev. 5 : 9; 7 : 9). As soon as Paul has made up his mind that enough has been done in the eastern part of the empire, he begins to look towards Spain (Rom. 5 : 19 ff.). The message is for the whole world; and it is out of the whole world that believers are brought together in the faith of the one God, who had revealed himself in Jesus Christ and whose action men perceived through the Holy Spirit.

These groups of Christians called themselves the *ekklesia* (cf. French *église*) or as we say in English, the 'church'. The Greek word was used to designate the 'popular assembly' of the Greek city-state; and in the Septuagint (see p. 50) it is applied to Israel as the 'elect people of God'. The Christians' use of the term—which they adopted and applied to themselves—corresponded to that and at the same time pointed the contrast between them and the disobedient nation of the Jews which had rejected its Messiah. The Christians were the people of the promised 'new Covenant' (see section 1), the people who had been cleansed of sin and had surrendered themselves to the leading of the Spirit of God.

The word 'church' (cf. German *Kirche*; Dutch *kerk*; Scots *kirk*) is probably connected with the Greek *Kuriakè*: i.e. that which pertains to the *Kurios*, the Lord Jesus Christ. The supplementary word here is *oikia*, 'house'. In the New Testament the word *ekklesia* does duty for the local, as well as the universal, Christian community. So for that matter does the word 'church' in English, although in some languages there are distinguishing terms.

Paul speaks of this *ekklesia* as a body of which Christ is the head, and of its members as the limbs, united to that head and to one another (Eph. 4 : 15 f.; cf. also I Cor.

12 : 12 ff., with v. 26: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together'—indicating the strength and cohesion of the reciprocal relationship). He is voicing a commonly accepted idea when he says: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?' (I Cor. 3 : 16). The church then is the place where God's Spirit is operative, his domain. The foundation on which this community is built is Christ (I Cor. 3 : 10 ff.).

The churches did not at first meet locally in special buildings (such as we have in mind when we talk about 'going to church') but in private dwellings—as, for instance, at the house of Mark's mother, Mary, in Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 12) or of Philemon at Colossae (Philemon 2; cf. also Rom. 16 : 5; I Cor. 16 : 19; Col. 4 : 15). Being drawn from so many different countries, they must have constituted a very mixed crowd of people. In the case of a prominent couple like Aquila and Priscilla, for example, one can follow the course of their movements from one place to another. The husband came originally from Pontus. They lived in Rome, but were forced out of there in A.D. 49, moving first to Corinth and later to Ephesus (Acts 18 : 2, 18, 26). In Ephesus they struck up an acquaintance with Apollos of Alexandria, who eventually made his way to Corinth (Acts 18 : 24 ff.; 19 : 1). The main point of difference was always between Christians with a Jewish background and those of gentile origin, as one can easily understand when one calls to mind their markedly different spiritual 'pedigrees' (cf. chapter II, sections 2 and 3). All this diversity had imposed a violent strain on the earliest Christian communities. Paul had had to struggle fiercely for the principle of equal status before God, who is 'no respecter of persons' (i.e. is not given to partiality; Rom. 2 : 11); and Peter, to his considerable astonishment, had seen the truth of this for himself at the

house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Although the idea had met with bitter resistance from certain converts with a Pharisaic background, it had in the end prevailed (Acts 15). Indeed it was bound to do so, because the fact that there is no distinction between men in the sight of God lies at the very heart of the New Testament message. It said in the Old Testament that even the gentiles were to praise God (see the passages quoted in Romans 15 : 9 ff.). So in the church men are 'with one voice (to) glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 15 : 6). This idea of oneness, of unity, is most prominent and most cogently expressed in Ephesians (see Eph. 2 : 11 ff.): 'For he (Christ) is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.' Within the church no divisions or distinctions are to be allowed. All have sinned; and for that reason all have come short of what is acceptable to God (cf. Rom. 3 : 23, 24). 'Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all' (Col. 3 : 11; cf. Gal. 3 : 28, which adds: 'male and female').

What men are prone to regard as the social distinctions would obviously remain. Some church members were people of substance. There was Lydia, for example, a woman in quite a big way of business (Acts 16 : 14); and there were property-owners like Philemon. In Acts 17 : 4 we read that Paul had a following among certain ladies of rank or high social standing. For them to embrace Christianity was not so difficult, because they did not have the same duties and responsibilities towards society as the men. But there were also slaves, who when rules of conduct are being laid down are frequently singled out for mention (see p. 146). One gets the impression from I Corinthians 1 : 26 that a community like the Corinthian church did not

include many very notable people: 'not many of you were wise . . . not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth'; (Paul's point here being, of course, that God's activity is 'peculiar' precisely because as a result of it the 'weak things' are made strong). On the other hand, the church could include among its members an orator like Apollos.

All these folk had accepted Christ, had been 'converted' or 'turned about'. If Jews, they had accepted the Crucified One as the Messiah (Rom. 1 : 4). Of the gentiles Paul could truly write (in I Thess. 1 : 9-10): 'You turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.' We may be sure too that there were some who professed the faith for a time, but eventually gave it up (see e.g. I Tim. 1 : 19; II Tim. 4 : 10; Rev. 2 : 4 f., 20). Some took to Christianity out of sheer inquisitiveness and were then disappointed. Others again recoiled from the hardships which a Christian profession involved—for being a disciple of Jesus meant making very great sacrifices (cf. Luke 14 : 25 ff.; I Thess. 2 : 14; it exposed one to slander, I Pet. 2 : 12; 3 : 16, or to loss of possessions or of life itself, Heb. 10 : 33 ff.; Rev. 2 : 13). The repeated exhortations to be 'steadfast in the faith', which occur again and again throughout the New Testament, were only too necessary. The believer had to come to terms with the fact that he was going to enter the kingdom 'through many tribulations' (Acts 14 : 22); but he had the more than sufficient consolation of knowing that 'if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself' (II Tim. 2 : 13).

The several churches were cemented together 'in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' (Eph. 4 : 3 ff.). This passage expresses how Christians were united in their confession, first, of the God whom they knew from the Old Testament proclamation and through the preaching of Jesus Christ, then of Jesus as the Lord who in his cross and resurrection had revealed God's victorious love, and, finally, of the Holy Spirit who renewed and directed their life. By that God they were 'called'; and it was that which gave them hope, because he had adopted them as his children and would one day receive them into his glory (see also Rev. 21 : 3, 7).

If men were united in this confession, it was not because they had agreed together to subscribe certain formulas, but rather because they found themselves united in a common bond with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom they worshipped, through whom they had obtained salvation, whose power was visible in the church. To be part of the *ekklesia* meant more than just belonging to some kind of ordinary, human organization; for it set its mark on the whole of a man's life. Something of what was involved is specified in Acts 2 : 42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

It was above all in the church assemblies that this fellowship became a visible reality. In the context of Judaism, such meetings must originally have been held on the sabbath day, the weekly day of rest. The gentile world, on the other hand, had no such fixed rest-day; so presumably it could not have been long before the 'first day of the week' was regularly set aside for meetings (Acts 20 : 7; Rev. 4 : 1; there are also later shreds of evidence outside the New Testament, among them a letter written by the Roman governor, Pliny). However, we cannot be at all sure that this was so during the earliest period; and we



must remember that in any case life of a Sunday went on very much as usual. When the church foregathered, its services were not held in secret. Since people needed to hear the gospel preached (Rom. 10 : 14), enquirers and non-believers would have been welcome to attend (I Cor. 14 : 13 ff.), the whole point being that in Christ God discloses his testimony openly, 'in the sight of all the people' (Rom. 16 : 25).

At the meetings the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament were read and interpreted with Christ and his church in view; and besides that, some account would undoubtedly have been given of the Lord Jesus, his life and work (cf. I Cor. 11 : 23 ff.). He was proclaimed and acclaimed as the Messiah. Then too hymns would be sung (Col. 3 : 16) and prayers said (I Cor. 14 : 26). The congregation responded with their 'amen'; that is, with this Hebrew word (meaning 'it is sure', 'it is indeed so') they assumed responsibility for what had been said by making it their own. The purpose of it all was to edify and to strengthen faith; and various church members would make their contribution to that end. 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification' (I Cor. 14 : 25). It was the Holy Spirit who actuated them and inspired their confession ('Abba, Father', Rom. 8 : 15; 'Jesus is Lord', I Cor. 12 : 3). His activity was evident in the great variety of gifts manifested in the individual members (see I Cor. 12 : 4 ff.); but all this rich diversity was understood as coming from one Giver and as having one single purpose. 'God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues' (I Cor. 12 : 28).

See too the list of functions enumerated in Ephesians

4 : 11 ff. : Christ's 'gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints (i.e. Christians), for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ'; and Romans 12 : 6 ff. : 'Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.' The reference to 'prophets' calls to mind such people as Agabus, who was suddenly enabled to speak of future events (Acts 11 : 28; 21 : 10, 11). 'Speaking in tongues' consisted of ecstatic utterance in some unintelligible language. It certainly did occur; but Paul contends that it is better to speak in a sober, matter-of-fact way, 'with understanding', so that others may be helped as a result (I Cor. 14 : 9 ff.).

Thus the edification of the church was as much a matter of spiritual supervision as of more palpable acts of service and healing. Those who carried out this work, the apostles and prophets, were not always tied to one particular spot, as we can see from the life of Paul, for example. These preachers would move around, fortifying the churches in their faith (Acts 14 : 22; 15 : 32, 41) and of course themselves forming a visible bond of unity between the various local communities. Others certainly stayed put. Whenever Paul took leave of a new local church, he would appoint 'elders' (Greek: *presbuteroi*; see Acts 14 : 23) who because of their wisdom and authority were competent to exercise 'oversight'; (hence their title of 'overseers'; Greek: *episkopoi*). What was expected of these elders appears very clearly from the stirring address which Paul delivered to a group of them at Miletus (Acts 20 : 17 ff.).

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The English word 'priest' is the Greek *presbuteros* in a mutated form; and similarly, *episkopos* has given us the English word 'bishop'. The words have acquired their derivative sense within the church during the long passage of history. The New Testament, however, makes no radical distinction between them. 'Priests', as the Old Testament and the pagan religions understood the term—i.e. as referring to people who offer sacrifices of animals and so forth to God—have no place in the church of the New Testament. The sacrifice offered there by Jesus Christ is 'sufficient' (see Heb. 9). When anyone speaks, as a Christian, of 'sacrifice', the reference is to the body, which is to be placed entirely at God's service (Rom. 12 : 1, 2; Eph. 5 : 1). As regards the qualifications needed by those who held this or that position of leadership within the church, these are discussed in the letters to Timothy and Titus.

The 'service' so often referred to—and this includes those passages where it says that Jesus came to serve (see p. 107)—is *diakonia*. Such service found expression in help rendered to travellers, to the poor and the sick. Obviously the desire to copy the example of Christ is an important consideration here—just as, when the apostles speak, they do so on behalf of him who has sent them (p. 73). The true disciple shows in the way he lives the marks of the presence of his Lord. The women too were fully geared into the operation; for they functioned as prophetesses (Acts 21 : 9; I Cor. 11 : 2 ff.), as deaconesses (see Rom. 16 : 1 regarding Phœbe) and even took part in the preaching of the gospel (Philip. 4 : 2 ff.). A special place was assigned to widows (I Tim. 5 : 3 ff.).

Of all the Christian gatherings the one that most strikingly, perhaps, exhibited the underlying unity of the fellowship was the meal known, for short, as 'the love (feast)' (Jude

v. 12). It was a 'memorial' or commemorative celebration of the Last Supper which Jesus had taken with his disciples (see p. 83 f.). This memorial was not simply and solely an act of remembrance. The governing factor—and the centre of concern—was the overriding significance of the sacrifice of Christ, the Risen Lord, and what that meant for mankind and for the world. When some failed to understand this and made it simply an occasion for feasting, Paul had to impress its meaning upon them in no uncertain terms (I Cor. 11 : 23 ff.; cf. 10 : 14 ff.: through the Last Supper we have communion with the Lord): we 'proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'.

. In New Testament times this Supper was not such an unaccustomed thing as it is for us. It was taken very much like an ordinary repast; for one has to remember that bread and wine were then the normal ingredients of any meal, as indeed they still are in those parts of the world. Cf. also Acts 20 : 7, along with 27 : 35. A grace or 'giving of thanks' (Greek: *eucharistia*) was the usual thing, whenever food and drink were consumed.

It was a special day for the community when new members were admitted by baptism, as Jesus had told his disciples to do. Baptism was administered to people only after they had made a profession of Christian belief (Acts 8 : 37; cf. also 9 : 18, for the case of Paul). By being thus immersed in water they were united with Christ, so intimately that they became—to use Paul's expression—'planted together' (Authorized Version) with him. In baptism they underwent, as it were, the death of Jesus and rose again to a new life (Rom. 6 : 1 ff.). It was a washing away of former sins and the beginning of the life with Christ (I Cor. 6 : 11; Col. 2 : 12). Paul describes it in these terms: one puts off the old nature, he says, like a piece of discarded clothing, and puts on the new nature

(Col. 3 : 9-10). Having come out of the darkness of sin into the light of Christ, Christians were to live as 'children of light' (cf. John 8 : 12; II Cor. 4 : 6; Eph. 5 : 8; I Pet. 2 : 9). In most cases they received, either at their baptism or after it, the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8 : 17; 19 : 1 ff.), which gave them the needed inspiration for living the new life.

The Christian faith did not find an outlet merely in the assemblies of the church, but set its mark on every department of life. If a man belonged to Christ, the transformation in his behaviour generally was evident to all. God is holy, and must therefore be served in holiness (I Pet. 1 : 15) and not in conformity with the individual's own passions and desires (see Rom. 6; I Pet. 1 : 13 ff.). The apostles were always giving directions and advice about this in their correspondence. It was absolutely essential for the Christian to make a clean break with unchastity, with the craving for personal gain, with heathen religious practices, with lying and cheating; and he must at all costs deal honourably with all men, adopting an attitude of love and forgiveness towards them.

See, for instance, the contrasted lists of moral qualities in Galatians 5 : 19 ff.: 'Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.' See also Eph. 5 : 1 ff. and Col. 3—two further examples of what is a constantly recurring theme in the New Testament.

For the first Christians the truth of Jesus's saying that 'no man can serve two masters' (Matt. 6 : 24) was a stark reality of daily life. To cleave to the Lord Jesus meant breaking completely with other powers and authorities,

and subjugating one's will and personal desires. In everything that Christians said and did they should and they could witness to their Lord (Col. 3 : 17). As a matter of fact, it often turned out that those who were not to be persuaded by much speaking were won over, in the end, by the bearing and behaviour of Christian people (I Pet. 3 : 1). Because therefore they took their stand as men and women who were citizens of God's kingdom (Philip. 3 : 20), Christians lived as 'strangers' on the earth (see in this connection the list of the 'heroic faithful' in Heb. 11); but this did not mean that they simply withdrew from the world and left it to its own devices. On the contrary, they were to carry on with their ordinary work (II Thess. 3 : 10 ff.), to excel even in 'good works', and to live in such a way that anybody and everybody would be bound to praise their conduct (I Pet. 2 : 12 ff.). Christ had, after all, been sent into the world to save it; and the point of all this—it need hardly be said—is that the Christian is called upon to imitate him.

Cf. I Cor. 10 : 26, 30 ff.: 'For the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24 : 1) . . . If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God . . . just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' The same largeness of outlook, combined with the same insistence on the Christian's fealty, is the theme of I Cor. 3 : 22, 23: ' . . . the world or life or death or the present or the future, all things are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.'

What had to be asked about everything was whether it served God or whether it distracted and led men away from him; and then, of course, it was to be accepted or

rejected, as the case might be, without any half measures, because God himself was involved in the issue.

Whatever the circumstances, it was always God's kingdom that must be kept in view. Remembering that, the disciple was assured of victory in the strength of the Christ who through suffering had entered into his glory (Luke 24 : 26). The certainty that 'provided we suffer with him . . . we may also be glorified with him' (Rom. 8 : 17) the sure conviction that a share in the inheritance was theirs, enabled these early Christians to bear with courage every trial and hardship and act of persecution. Their attitude was not one of rebellion or escapism, but of steady and patient endurance: 'Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God' (Heb. 12 : 1, 2).

But as that twelfth chapter of Hebrews shows, the difficulties did not all come from outside; some arose from within. We hear tell, for instance, of sinfulness and weariness of spirit among the brethren. Evidently it was not the case that once a man had made his choice for Christ, he had necessarily got the better of all his troubles and vices. Jesus had spoken of 'taking up a cross daily' (Luke 9 : 23). Paul too was aware that 'when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand (Rom. 7 : 21). It was natural enough then that grave sins should be rampant, even within the Christian communities; for they were beset on every side by snares and pitfalls. All kinds of strange ideas were in the air. Among the Corinthians, for example, there were those who denied the resurrection (I Cor. 15). Then in Thessalonica a number of people stopped all their active

Christian work because they thought that Christ was about to return. Some took the Christian doctrine of forgiveness to imply that it was quite in order to commit sin 'that grace may abound' (cf. Rom. 3 : 8; 6 : 1). In face of all this confusion the apostles felt bound to persist in explaining what was the right way for a Christian to think and behave. Internal dissension too was rife—not merely ordinary bickering of a kind not unusual among hotblooded southerners, but also division and even schism. Paul had some experience of this in Corinth (I Cor. 1-3), where instead of observing the bounds of a perfectly natural and proper diversity, the church had split into cliques which had rallied around this or that prominent individual, armed with such slogans as 'I am of Paul; I am of Peter; I of Apollos.' Paul condemns this and points out that these men, himself included, are no more than servants doing their job in different ways, but that Christ is not divided. It is not Paul, he says, but Christ who was crucified for the Corinthians and is their Saviour. Later on a whole medley of heretical teachers came along (see especially the Letters to Timothy and Titus; also Jude), who undermined 'sound doctrine' with what purported to be various kinds of subtle theories and arguments, seeking to draw the churches away from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Certainly, the New Testament speaks of the *ekklesia* in glowing terms as a 'pillar and bulwark of the truth' (I Tim. 3 : 15), as being 'in splendour, without spot or wrinkle . . . holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5 : 27); but on the other hand this ideal picture must not blind us to the reality. There were some pretty strange goings-on among the 'saints' and 'brethren', as the Christians called one another. And all too often it was palpably and painfully evident that 'that which is perfect' had not yet come. Still, the eyes of the faithful were fastened, not upon men but on Jesus



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Christ—the One who cleanses men from their sin and through his Spirit draws them into his service. With him, who gave his life and whom God has raised in glory, lay the assurance of things present and things to come (Rom. 8 : 38). It was possible for men to face whatever life in this world might bring, with faith and hope and love, because they had been gathered out of many nations and peoples into the one *ekklesia*.

### 2. *The new way*

Those who had seen and heard Jesus and had been sent out by him into the world have delivered their message of the 'new Covenant' which God has made with man through Jesus Christ, of the gift which he has presented to the world in his Son. 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our (own) eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (I John 1 : 1-3). As a result of that proclamation by those who had seen and heard, churches have sprung into being here, there and everywhere—communities of men and women believing in Jesus Christ. Already the generation of those who had known Jesus Christ in person belongs to a distant past. Yet the movement does not come to a standstill. In spite of opposition and of many dangers and difficulties it goes forward, ever stronger and ever more widespread, like the circles in

a pool of water which continue to enlarge and multiply long after the stone which set them in motion has sunk to the bottom. The ripples which at his departure Jesus had set up in the locality of Palestine have spread further and further outwards to the very 'circumference' of the earth.

Of the testimony of those who had seen and heard—in other words, of the apostles—their writings are the permanent record. And that written testimony of theirs has ensured that what they had received from Jesus can also be received by us in this present age. If it had been handed down simply by word of mouth, it might very quickly have been changed out of all recognition; but it was given written, and consequently permanent, form. When after the apostles' time attempts were made to connect the name of Jesus with certain erroneous doctrines, the churches collected together these documents containing the apostolic witness about their Lord and Saviour so that they could know for sure what manner of person he had been and what he had bequeathed to them. That compilation of theirs is, of course, our New Testament. And now, these many centuries later, this book continues day in, day out, to tell its story of the relationship, the bond of fellowship, which God has established with men in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament is read today in a host of different languages and in almost every corner of the globe. It is, of course, a highly diversified collection of writings that the long passage of the centuries has carried down to us. And the church, living in the midst of the world, has already had a long and very tumultuous history. But always the 'New Testament' has remained with her, helping continually to focus her attention upon him who is the Lord of the church. Right through that long history the generations of men have studied and used the New Testa-

ment. Its message has awakened so many and such strange echoes that it looks sometimes as though a man can take from it, or read into it, almost any meaning he chooses. Its readers have sometimes accepted the message, sometimes rejected it; but no one who has really felt the impact of the New Testament can simply let it be. Admittedly, circumstances have changed out of all recognition since New Testament times. We live nowadays in a different world. But what we have here is no 'statute book', laying down for us an imperative law and imposing that upon us, as it were, under the forms of a bygone age. On the contrary, the remarkable thing about this book is that above and beyond every change of circumstance it still points us to the God of whom it speaks, to the eternal God who in every generation takes us men to be his children and never desists from pursuing his plan and purpose for us. Ever and again the central message of the gospel speaks to men: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3 : 16). Man after man has been amazed at the discovery that he has no need to follow a devious and unending way in his search for the unknown God—for it is God who has gone in search of him: 'not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son' (I John 4 : 10). Time and time again men and women are constrained to display something of that divine love in their own lives, because they have apprehended a new commandment: 'You shall love the Lord your God . . . and . . . your neighbour as yourself' (Matt. 22 : 37-40).

The New Testament does not deliver this divine message in a systematic form or as a body of consequential propositions, logically and neatly rounded off. Indeed it does not lend itself to being contained within a system, because it speaks of the love of God for men. Love that is real and

true utters itself in a single word or in a simple act—and yet is so tremendous a thing that words cannot express it adequately at all. Thus the whole gospel is enshrined within a single New Testament saying; yet at the same time one is aware that the peace of God passes all understanding (Philip. 4 : 7).

How is it that so old a book can speak to us of a New Testament—and with a voice that is also ever new? It happens, not because of any virtue inherent in the words themselves, but because they are touched into life by the Spirit of God. Perhaps we today can understand better than earlier generations how the Holy Spirit does his work, for we have the analogy of radio and television to help us. Silently and invisibly, words and images are carried over enormous distances and then become audible and visible to all who have a properly adjusted receiving apparatus at their disposal. This receptivity the New Testament calls 'faith'. The same Spirit who inspired the New Testament writers is always at work, making their voice and their achievement meaningful for men who are ready to listen and to hear.

The New Testament builds of course upon the foundations of the Old Testament; but it is something genuinely new. Jesus Christ does not merely talk about the way of God, the way to God, does not simply point us to God—but Jesus *is* himself the way.

The title of this section is taken from Hebrews 10 : 19 ff., where the various elements of the New Testament message are briefly recapitulated: 'Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with

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a true heart in full assurance of faith, and with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.' The writer makes use here of an image connected with the Jewish temple. The high priest was the only person allowed, once a year, to go into the holy of holies, where God was thought to dwell, in order to make propitiation for sins. But by his sacrifice Jesus has rendered it possible for all to enter; so that through him men may freely make their approach to the great God. At the same time this passage indicates the bond of unity that exists between Christians.

The word 'new', as used in the New Testament, connotes 'that which is unexpected or unlooked for'. It stands in opposition to what is 'old' and of proven inadequacy. There is an element of the revolutionary here, because it leaves nothing as it is, or accepted for what it is, but sets all things in the light of God. Yet such 'newness' is also final and conclusive and all-sufficient, in that nothing can succeed to it, or supersede it, which is 'more new'. The New Testament declares that whilst the binding relationship with God is on a once-for-all basis, it carries with it an essential element of expectation; for 'according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (II Pet. 3 : 13). The 'newness' is not as yet realized in all its perfection; and so the 'new Covenant' will always call for continuous renewal.

The New Testament message is *exclusive* in that it speaks of one God who is to be served to the exclusion of everything and everybody not 'of him', and speaks too of Jesus Christ as the one 'name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4 : 12), to the exclusion

of any other agency. It is exclusive in that it presents man with a single choice, for or against this God.

Yet the New Testament message is *inclusive* too, because it speaks of God's love for the whole creation—which he renews—and for all men, since he 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2 : 4)—and *that* without any distinction between godly and ungodly or any discrimination on the ground of race or nation. Again, the message is inclusive in that it envisages God's search for men working out in an endless variety of ways.

The New Testament is also radical: it displays, that is to say, a 'root and branch' quality. It shows that no human being satisfies God's demands; whilst at the same time it refuses to relax those demands by one jot or tittle. It insists upon their total fulfilment, yet points to the total forgiveness which God graciously bestows in Christ. It is radical in that it speaks of God's victorious acts by which he triumphs over all the powers of evil.

Amidst the dreadful chaos of selfishness and oppression and rebellion against God which the Revelation of John describes there rings forth the voice of him who sits upon the throne: 'Behold, I make all things new' (Rev. 21 : 5). And Paul knew that a start has already been made with this renewal. 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (II Cor. 5 : 17).

There is a new relationship of God to men when God makes himself visible in his Son, when he puts his holy will into action and carries out his plan. He is no longer the stranger-God, the unknown Being; nor is he utterly mysterious, even though a considerable element of enigma must remain. He is no fateful necessity, either, but love. So great indeed is his love that even the sacrifice of his Son

is not too much to make, when there is no other way to bring man back to himself. The relationship of men to God is likewise something new. Men are able now to know him, to trust him, to see him as their Father. All their striving comes to nothing; for by their own efforts they cannot attain to him. It is God who himself opens up the way whereby men are linked to him, are led and guided by his Spirit and are set free.

Moreover, there is now a new relation of man to man and to the world. This earth is something created by God, in which man may discover afresh the glory and majesty of the Creator. His fellows are neither rivals nor enemies, but—whether they realize it or not—the objects of God's love. Love therefore, in the infinite variety of forms which it can and does assume, is the true token of the proper relationship between men.

Man learns too how to regard his own life in a new way, as a gift from God, as a responsibility conferred by him, as an adventure of which the final prospect is not 'chaos and dark night' but the kingdom of God. The gift of a new confidence, a new happiness, a new approach to living, is bestowed upon him. When mistakes are made and things go wrong, a man need not give way to despair; for he lives in and by God's forgiveness and knows that he will always be given another chance. Even amidst the worst that life can inflict 'our inner nature is being renewed every day' (II Cor. 5 : 16).

Whatever his problems and uncertainties, the Christian can live in the sure confidence that nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8 : 39). 'He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it' (I Thess. 5 : 24).

All this the New Testament sets before us, not as a soothing current of words but in the concrete particularity

of a life. In the life of Jesus we may see what redemption means, and how God turns seeming disaster into joy and gladness. In the career of his disciples we see this Jesus transforming their lives, guiding them as their Lord, preparing and directing their way towards the fulfilment of his ultimate purpose.

We have seen in this book something of the great riches which the New Testament has to offer. By coming back to the New Testament again and again and by prayerful contact with him who stands at the centre of it one can explore those riches at ever deeper and deeper levels. Just to be able to say that we have read through it a few times surely cannot be the end of the matter. There can be no end to it, really, if only because there is no end to the greatness of God's love. The wonderful thing about God's book is that in all the changes and chances of this life it opens up ever new vistas, new prospects before us, and that the more mature and experienced a reader is, the more likely he is to be arrested and astonished by what it says. The more one studies this book, the better one understands the truth of the dictum:

The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

There is a saying of Paul's which embodies a similar thought: 'Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own' (Philip. 3 : 12).



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## *Books for Further Reading*

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